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THE WAR FOR THE  
LAND IN IRELAND

# THE WAR FOR THE LAND IN IRELAND

*by*

BRIAN O'NEILL

*with an introduction by*

PEADAR O'DONNELL

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*TO  
MY MOTHER  
WHO KNEW THE  
EMIGRANT  
SHIP*

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS book makes no pretence to any great original research in its historical part. We all know our history in Ireland; what is needed is Marxian analysis. The material on the present position of Irish and world agriculture will, however, be new to most readers. I desire to thank George Anstrom, of the Labour Research Bureau, New York, to whom I am indebted for data on the United States; Proinnsias O'Riain, who gave me the use of the files of *An Phoblacht*; Sean Murray, who read the manuscript and made many suggestions; and Caitlin Ni Leidhin, who performed much drudgery in connection with the book.

B. O'N.

DUBLIN, May 1933.

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## INTRODUCTION

**H**ERE is a book quarried out of material that is of vital importance to separatist movements in Ireland to-day, and especially to the Irish rural masses. At long last the wealth of experiences concealed in the records of the fight for land in Ireland is being called on to yield up its story and its lesson. And, it is not without significance that this task is undertaken by Brian O'Neill, a member of the youthful Communist movement in Ireland.

Dangerous writing in our country seems always to have been done by that section of the national revolutionary forces which Brian O'Neill represents. One recalls Connolly's statement that all the really dangerous revolutionaries in Ireland advocated their principles as part of the creed of the democracy of the world. If the presentation of the various Irish struggles is going to come to-day from the pen of the revolutionary working class factor in the anti-imperialist alignment, then we are on the fringe of a new phase in Irish politics. The Connolly tradition is coming in again, and the fight to mobilise the urban and rural masses on its basis is on. This book will be widely read in rural Ireland. In many minds it will do two things. It will say things that small farmer folk have long been fumbling to express for themselves, and it will reveal where exactly

the Connolly tradition touches their lives. This book will raise sparks; it may even start a fire.

Connolly has been almost driven from among the national fathers, whose teachings are to be studied. We are back again at the stage when a middle-class leadership is busy uniting all the people of Ireland to overthrow the common enemy, England. Anything in the nature of class warfare is to be suppressed because it would weaken the national forces. The solution of Ireland's political aim is to be sought in this unity. Our economic needs will be met by a network of tiny private industries and a mosaic of small farms. In small farmer areas this sort of talk is hard pushed to raise any illusions. It has to be supported by relief works and excited promises to absorb the youth into industries that are to be created somewhere, somehow. The leaders of political parties appeal as a last resort to the patriotism of the rural masses to put up with hardships as a necessary part of the sacrifice in the fight against England.

It is obviously necessary to suppress Connolly's teachings if a middle-class leadership is to hold a backing in these circumstances. This suppression is done quite cleverly. His name is not dropped, but only such of his writings as can, by careful selection, be used to attract the toiling masses to seek the freedom of Ireland through a "united struggle" are invoked. He is never presented as the leader of the Irish working class, who saw that the final battleground for Irish freedom must be the revolutionary struggle of the Irish workers

against Irish capitalism. If his Socialism is ever mentioned, it is to admit a fault which the manner of his death redeemed!

The blame for this desertion of Connolly must rest in great measure on the leadership of the Trades Union movement. They allowed themselves to be pushed completely out of the leadership of the national struggle that was re-built after 1916 and failed entirely to keep closely associated with the Irish Citizen Army. Thus the revolutionary working class in Dublin was surrendered to a middle-class leadership, which flung the slogan abroad, "Labour must wait." Later, when the Irish middle class was making its bargain with British imperialism, the Labour leadership carried its betrayal a step farther and helped the organisation of the usurping Treatyite Government.

In all this the workers of Belfast and the industrial North-East generally played a very unfortunate rôle. Here, where the great weight of the Irish proletarian population is concentrated, the owning class were able not merely to hold these workers apart from the national struggle, but actually to make them available for imperial reaction. This collapse of the working class of the North-East was a tragedy for the whole working-class movement and for the national struggle; it was a calamity for the British workers, too. British Trades Unions are far from guiltless, for it is undoubtedly true that in their struggle to hold and recruit members they yielded to the reactionary ideas, and even capitalised them where there was competition with an Irish Union.

In my opinion, the relation between the social rights of the toilers and the fight for national independence has been more persistently maintained by the small farmer population, even than by the industrial workers in the South. So completely did the Labour movement yield to the slogan, "Labour must wait," that there was no need to put through, or even to make a pretence of putting through, any serious scheme of social benefits. On the other hand, in the midst of the 'Tan War, a department had to be created to hold out a promise for the distribution of ranches, and right in the midst of all the turmoil of 1923 the usurping Government had to rush through a Land Bill, making a similar promise.

During the fever of the Tan days it took all the influence of the Republican Government and the use of Republican forces to hold the land struggle in check. It was at this period that the middle-class leadership exerted itself frantically to keep the movement "clean." Even ranchers themselves helped in this work. I can recall an instance where a land monopolist complained to a local company Captain that his fences were being broken. He assured the I.R.A. officer that while he differed politically from the Volunteers, he had the greatest respect for their bravery and their unselfish struggle for their ideals. "But there are always people on the fringe of a movement," he said, "who are out for their own personal gain and such people, if not checked, would disgrace the movement. There was this matter of his fences. Greedy small farmers and men that had never owned a spadeful of land were

taking advantage of the brave fight of the Volunteers to further their own interests. If this was not stopped promptly the whole movement would be degraded." And the local officer just escaped allowing himself to be used to round up the offenders at the bidding of the imperialist monopolist. From such sources grow the teachings of "classless nationalism."

But in many areas Volunteers were actually used to control the rural masses who would identify the national struggle with their own struggle for free land. And this, in face of the fact that these were the people who exhausted their substance to support "Flying Columns" and to harbour "wanted men." To-day, these same folk see that their sacrifices were ignored, whilst any trader who lost even a pot of jam could claim compensation and have his claim allowed. They see themselves as far from free access to the ranches as ever. They even see families being rescued from patches of soil between rocks—to be dumped down in holdings of bleached grasses over quaking bog. Good land can only be acquired at such a price that the burden of it, passed on to the rescued Gael, would crash him quickly, so he goes to the unburdened bog, where his own weight will sink him. It is in these circumstances that the rural masses are beginning to voice their discontent against leaderships that will not tolerate any attempt to "degrade the nationalist movement into a sordid struggle for land."

Any republican congress in Ireland to-day brings this question of the place of land struggles in national move-



ments sharply into view. Erroneous deductions from the experiences of the Fenians are allowed to influence these assemblies. The fight for free land is to be held apart altogether from the national struggle. Mitchel might never have recorded the agrarian struggles as part of Ireland's fight for freedom. Lalor might never have taught that the agrarian struggle was the hinge for the whole national revolution. "The towns may fight for repeal," Lalor wrote, "but not a grey coat will shoulder a musket for it," even Lalor failing to see the working class, shut in behind the middle-class leadership in the towns, as the allies of the rural masses.

Brian O'Neill does some of his best work in tracing the relationship of the Fenian movement to the land struggles. Karl Marx saw in the Fenian conspiracy the small farmers mainly organising to maintain grip of their holdings. Agrarian societies were absorbed into the Fenians, and they must have carried their ideals with them, for we find evidence of their stubborn insistence on the association of the agrarian and the national struggles. We find, too, that the Fenian leaders were as set against that association as was the republican leadership from 1918 onwards. The splendid John O'Leary spoke of "the ignorant and intractable Ribbonmen." Davitt states that the powerful pull of the Fenian leadership drawing agrarian societies away from land struggles to concentrate on training as purely military bodies secured for Irish landlords twenty years of peace. Fenian literature reveals that in its aims and ideals the demand for the smashing of landlordism and

land monopoly was preserved, but the records of the period of Fenian preparation for the rising show an increasing number of evictions. The Fenians failed to see that the writing-in of the aims and ideals did not compensate for the desertion of the day-to-day struggle. And their bravery when they did rise could not compensate for the mass backing which they had sacrificed by forcing their organisations to separate themselves from rural struggles.

The Land War in Ireland, which followed the defeat of the Fenians, was brought to a halt in the disgraceful Treaty of Kilmainham. Its story now reveals the splendid, wonderful resources of courage and endurance in the small farmer masses. It is annoying reading for those who took an active part in the 'Tan War in Ireland. It rouses a rage against the leadership, which shut out this wealth of revolutionary feeling and thought from the national fight. Had the rural masses been released in the midst of the 'Tan struggle; had ranches been handed over and landlordism smashed, the basis mobilised to force the Treaty of '22 would have been, instead, an impregnable fortress for the defence of the Republic.

But the Land War does more than demonstrate the resources of the countryside for revolutionary struggle. It reveals the inability of small farmers to form a national leadership. Such a movement is sure to be invaded by middle-class influences, for the small farmer dearly loves to have men of property on his platforms. And the only lesson he has yet learned to draw from

the successive betrayals is to start on a new hunt for honest men. In the absence of a strongly organised party of the working class to provide a revolutionary leadership for the urban and rural masses, rural struggles can never achieve their objective. The alliance of workers and working farmers behind such a leadership has never come into view in Ireland so backed and urged that it became a fixed factor in the struggles of both. It is, I think, true that Irish workers could depend on a better response to a call to the countryside in any great working-class crisis than peasant struggles would be likely to receive from the towns.

Brian O'Neill's book being released within a working-class organisation may force its way deeper into the working class than one otherwise sponsored. It is to be hoped so. It would be a good work to popularise this book in the trades unions. It would be a great work to popularise this book in small farmer areas.

I confess I am somewhat jealous of Brian O'Neill. I envy him the excitement of having worked on the material assembled here. I should love to have written this book.

PEADAR O'DONNELL.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EIGHTEENTH CENTURY STRUGGLES

THE end of the Cromwellian settlement in the seventeenth century, in James Connolly's words, found the Irish countryfolk "dispossessed of all hold upon the soil of Ireland—the Catholic dispossessed by force, the Protestant dispossessed by fraud."<sup>1</sup> Gone were the septs with their gentile security, and the Norman-Irish lords of the Pale with their settled feudal relations; gone the Catholic Gaels, beyond the Shannon into Connacht, "to the beat of drum and sound of trumpet"; gone, except where they had crept back as serfs, or where, in the North, they had fearfully laid hold of patches of grim, mountainy land that promised little but a never-ending struggle against hunger. And the Ulster Presbyterians, the men and the sons of the men who with their swords had won Ireland for the "territorial and capitalist expropriators of surplus value"<sup>2</sup>—they, too, had become part of the great robbed and ruled class.

Based on the cottier system, Irish agriculture in the eighteenth century was necessarily in the most barbarous stage of technical development. Madden, in his *Recollections and Resolutions of the Gentry of Ireland*, published in Dublin in 1738, gives an excellent picture

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<sup>1</sup> James Connolly: *Labour in Ireland*, Dublin, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx: *Capital*.

of Irish farming methods. "The great obstacle to our tillage," he stated, "is our negligence or ignorance in many material articles belonging to it, and our retaining several old customs which are very prejudicial to it. I shall give a few short hints of some of them; and the first I shall touch upon is that great instrument of tillage, the plough, which, in many places, we make in so odd a fashion here, that if it were carried to England they would hardly know what it was, and would be utterly at a loss how to use it, or till their land with it, at least to produce a tolerable crop. Instead of having different kinds of ploughs, as the strong Hertfordshire plough for the first, and the smaller, light, Suffolk plough for the second fallowing, and the little foot-plough for shutling up the furrow—instead of having several sorts (to say nothing of the new invented patent plough, and the double or four-coultered plough) for over-wet, stiff, clay grounds, or light, dry, sandy, loamy soils, we shift off all our business with one, and that is ill-contrived and ordered, and the Dutch would not wish us a worse. What is as bad as all the rest, 'tis often drawn, not by oxen, but by horses or garrons, as we call them, of different sizes, which many of the poorest Irish draw by the tail.

"But we work our ploughs as ill as we make them, when we turn up our fields with them, for we generally leave much of our soil entirely unturned, and the furrows bare, broad and unfruitful; even our richest lands are by no means wrought to a sufficient fineness. Thus, after a great deal of injudicious and unfruitful

labour, we rather drown or bury our grain than sow it. Though we plough too little through the Kingdom, each particular farmer often ploughs too much; that is, he grasps more than he can well manage, and what, by sowing too late, what for want of due care, sufficient manure, and proper culture, well applied, he has frequently a smaller crop on forty acres than he might on twenty well wrought with skilful management. Our neglect as to proper manures is intolerably great in our poorer lands. Numbers of them we know nothing of, and many of those we do know we do not employ to the best use and in a skilful manner, by which means it happens that our crops are so ordinary that our neighbours in England, under double rent, severe taxes, and treble wages for labour, with the help of a small premium, can bear the loss and charges of exporting their grain to us, and yet undersell us in our own towns.

“Numbers of the harrows of our poor farmers have their harrow-pins made of wood, and the tackle for them (and the plough also) of twisted gads and wretched tags cut out of the hides of horses; but even our best iron-pinned harrows are ill-contrived, both for the draught of the cattle and the breaking of clods. They are generally too light, and their pins too short, thin, and weak, and not right placed to answer each other, and, therefore, can never sufficiently raise and beat the mold. Thus we just scratch the ground only, as the Indians do; and, when we have done, we neither manure our land sufficiently, nor steep the sod in proper liquor to enrich it, nor use rollers to smooth and

flatten the mold; nay, we do not even mow the crop with scythes when it is ripened, but rich and poor cut it down entirely with hooks, what grain soever it be: and some of the less improved Irish, instead of threshing, do often burn the straw as the quickest and easiest way to get out the grain. This indeed is a terrible account of our husbandry. . . ."

The classes on the land could be divided roughly into landlords, middlemen and the labouring population. It is impossible to estimate the amounts sucked by the landlords from the sweat of the country people, but some slight indication of them is afforded by the sums remitted annually to absentee landlords in England. Absentee rents were calculated at £91,652 in 1691,<sup>3</sup> Prior estimated them at £390,000 in 1729, while Arthur Young gave the figure as £732,000 in 1779. The sums grew all through the century, the figure for 1797 being given as £1,500,000.<sup>4</sup>

Absenteeism bred the horde of middlemen. The landlords rented their estates to these vultures for a fixed sum, thus ensuring a regular income without taking the slightest interest in their lands. The middlemen then sub-let their farms on the "canting" system. Tenants whose leases had expired were compelled to bid against strangers for their holdings, and the insecurity of tenure forced up the rent with each expiration of the lease. The depredations of the middlemen

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<sup>3</sup> *Remarks on Affairs and Trade of England and Ireland*. London, 1691.

<sup>4</sup> *Irish Parliamentary Debates*. Vol. XVII.

in the first half of the century were so shameful that almost every writer has referred to them. "Living upon the spot, surrounded by their little under-tenants, the middlemen prove the most oppressive species of tyrant that ever lent assistance to the destruction of a country. They re-let the land, at short tenures, to the occupiers of small farms, and often give no leases at all. Not satisfied with screwing up the rent to the uttermost farthing, they are rapacious and relentless in the collection of it. . . . But farther, the dependence of the occupier on the resident middlemen goes to other circumstances; personal services of themselves, their cars and horses, is exacted for leading turf, hay, corn, gravel, etc., insomuch that the poor under-tenants often lose their own crops and turf, from being obliged to obey these calls of their superiors. Nay, I have even heard these jobbers gravely assert that, without under-tenants to furnish cars and teams at half or two-thirds the common price of the country, they could carry on no improvements at all; yet taking a merit to themselves for works wrought out of the sweat and ruin of a pack of wretches, assigned to their plunder by the inhumanity of the landlords."<sup>5</sup>

The countryfolk could be divided into three classes: "first, cottiers who hold at will a small take of land, seldom more than an acre, and grass for a couple of cows, at an exorbitant rent, which they work out at the small wages of four pence or five pence a day without

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Young: *Tour in Ireland*. Vol. II.



diet; second, persons who have short leases or leases of uncertain tenure at high rents; and third, the inhabitants of cottages in the neighbourhood of towns and small villages, who hold no land, and are supported by daily labour.”<sup>6</sup> Both the second and third classes formed only a fraction of the whole, for the consolidations of the following century were needed to create a new and huge class of propertyless proletarians, subsisting entirely by wage-labour, while leases were largely the preserve of the middlemen. The great majority of the Irish agrarian population were cottiers.

The wretched condition of the cottiers has been depicted by several eighteenth century writers. “There is not one farmer in a hundred through the kingdom who can afford shoes and stockings to his children, or to eat flesh or drink anything better than sour milk or water, twice in a year,” wrote Swift in 1726. “They are half-naked, half-starved; the poor wretches have hardly a skin of a potato to live on,” said Bush’s *Hibernia Curiosa* in 1764. At the end of the century their condition had not improved. “They could afford themselves but one meal a day, and that consisted of potatoes and butter-milk. . . . In Kerry they lived so low that I am assured by a medical man that the addition of a very small quantity of butter to their potatoes is used as a cordial with very evident advantage.”<sup>7</sup> Arthur Young, whose

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<sup>6</sup> Sir James Caldwell: *Proposal*, etc. Dublin, 1771.

<sup>7</sup> Whitley Stokes: *Project*, etc. Dublin, 1799.

work is a mine of information for the student of Irish social conditions, has given a graphic picture of the cottiers' cabins :

“ The cottages of the Irish, which are all called cabins, are the most miserable-looking hovels that can well be conceived; they generally consist of only one room : mud kneaded with straw is the common material of the walls; these are rarely above seven feet high, and not always above five or six; they are about two feet thick, and have only a door which lets in light instead of a window, and should let the smoke out instead of a chimney, but they had rather keep it in. . . . The furniture of the cabins is as bad as the architecture; in very many consisting only of a pot for boiling their potatoes, a bit of a table, and one or two broken stools; beds are not found universally, the family lying on straw, equally partook of by cows, calves and pigs; though the luxury of sties is coming in in Ireland, which excludes the poor pigs from the warmth of the bodies of their master and mistress; I remarked little hovels of earth thrown up near the cabins. . . . ”

Conditions such as these bred famine after famine. By 1729 Dean Swift could pen that masterpiece of savage satire, *A Modest Proposal* for the serving on the tables of “ persons of quality ” the superfluous children of hungry beggars—“ in which list I reckon all cottagers, labourers, and four-fifths of the farmers.” In 1740, it is estimated, about 400,000 persons died from starvation and famine-disease. “ Whole parishes were almost desolate, the dead were eaten in the fields by dogs: one

thousand had perished in a single barony.”<sup>8</sup> Another writer found “the roads spread with dead and dying bodies. Mankind of the colour of the docks and nettles which they feed on: two or three, sometimes more, on a car going to the grave for want of bearers to carry them.”<sup>9</sup> There were further partial famines in 1757, 1765 and 1770.

Immediately after the famine of 1740-1 another blow fell upon the peasantry. The British Government removed the embargo from Irish cattle, meat and dairy products, and immediately the lords of the soil scented increased profits. Tillage farms gave place to grazing ranches; there began, in Karl Marx’s words, the “supplanting of the Irish by sheep, pigs and bullocks.” Small tenants were evicted, their little farms incorporated into the sheep-walks, the remaining commons were openly filched, and tracts which formerly had given some sort of sustenance to hundreds of families were peopled now by only a handful of herdsmen or shepherds.

It was this first enclosure drive that welded the swelling indignation and crude resistance into the earliest known fighting organisations of the Irish country people. In the four provinces societies of the peasantry sprang up, though how far they worked in unison it is difficult to tell. Most famous of these were the Whiteboys of Munster, so-called from the white shirts they wore as disguise or uniform when on their nocturnal raids. The

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<sup>8</sup> *Skelton's Works*. Vol. V.

<sup>9</sup> *The Groans of Ireland*. Dublin, 1741.

Whiteboys fought with the desperation of men whose very existence was at stake. Hedges and walls enclosing commons or small farms were levelled, cattle were maimed and their herdsman's huts put to the flames, and the agents of the landlords were tarred and feathered, and, occasionally, assassinated. From this the struggle of the Whiteboys developed rapidly; they included in their programme all grievances connected with the buying and selling of land, tithes, rates and evictions. Offshoots of the Whiteboys have a heroic place in local records of the people—the Levellers of Tipperary, the Corkboys of Cork, the Rightboys, or followers of Captain Right, etc.

The ruling class, of course, and its instrument of oppression, the State machine, waged merciless war against the insurgent peasantry, and there were hangings, shootings and mass transportations. The landlord class, like Hempenstall of ill-fame, was “judge, jury, gallows and all”; there was small hope of mercy for the peasant who in the eyes of the landlord had committed the crime unforgivable, the modern sin against the Holy Ghost—an assault on private property “rights.”

A Coercion Act passed by the Irish Parliament in 1776 decreed “death to any person who by day or night shall shoot at, maim or disfigure any person or send any letter demanding any money, arms or ammunition or other thing or things.” Death to “any person who shall assault or injure the habitation, property, goods and chattels of any person, forcibly breaking into any house, barn or outhouse, or shall cause any door to be opened

by threats." Death to "any person who shall assist, abet, succour or conceal any of the afore-named offenders." And "fine, imprisonment, pillory, whipping or any other corporal punishment the court shall think fit, with security for good behaviour to any person who shall assemble or appear by day or night with any firearms or other offensive arms, with face or body disguised in any manner, wearing any badges or dress not usually worn on lawful occasions, or assuming any name or denomination not usually assumed by his Majesty's subjects."

Connolly, in his *Labour in Ireland*, gives an example of how "Catholic and Protestant proprietors united to fortify injustice and preserve their privileges, even at a time when we have been led to believe that the penal laws formed an insuperable barrier against such union." In 1762 the Government placed the sum of £100 on the heads of five leading Whiteboys. The Protestant inhabitants of Cork offered in addition £300 for the chief and £50 for each of his comrades. Immediately the propertied Catholics of the same city capped their fellow-capitalists' reward by adding £200 for the chief and £40 for each of his lieutenants. And, as Connolly reminds us, Flood, the great "patriot" and darling of the Irish bourgeoisie, in the House of Commons in 1763 denounced the Government for its "clemency" towards the Whiteboys!

Coercion was unable to suppress the Whiteboys. Thirty years after their first great effort we find a manifesto issued by them to the Munster peasantry complain-

ing especially against tithes, which were the taxes that the hated Established Church, to which only one-tenth of the population belonged, was entitled to levy on the people of each district. The exactions of the Catholic clergy were also a sore point. "The luxurious parson," stated the manifesto, "drowned in the riot of his table the bitter groans of those wretches that his proctor fleeced, and the poor remnant of the proctor's rapine was sure to be gleaned by the rapacious priest; but it was blasphemy to complain of him; Heaven, we thought, would wing its lightning to blast the wretch who grudged the holy father's share. Thus plundered by either clergy, we had reason to wish for our simple Druids again."

On July 1, 1786, a mass meeting was held and two resolutions of an illuminating character were ordered to be published, signed by William O'Driscoll, who described himself as "General to the Munster Peasantry":

"Resolved: That we will continue to oppose our oppressors by the most justifiable means in our power, either until they are glutted in our blood or until humanity raises her angry voice in the councils of the nation to protect the toiling peasant and lighten his burden.

"Resolved: That the fickleness of the multitude makes it necessary for all and each of us to swear not to pay voluntarily priest or parson more than as follows:

"Potatoes, first crop, 6s. per acre; do., second crop, 4s.; wheat, 4s.; barley, 4s.; oats, 3s.; meadowing, 2s. 6d.;

marriage, 5s.; baptism, 1s. 6d.; Par. Priest's Sun. Mass, 1s.; any other, 1s.; Extreme Unction, 1s."

In Ulster, too, the agrarian war of the classes smouldered all through the eighteenth century, bursting into heroic flame with the struggle of the Hearts of Steel in 1770. That they were of the dominant religion saved the Northern peasantry not at all. The Hearts of Steel were almost entirely Protestant and Presbyterian. They fought against the insatiable greed of the undertakers and middlemen, "consolidations," the tithes of the clergy of the Established Church, unjust cess and bad labour conditions (for there was a proletarian flavour to the Hearts of Steel; many of the growing class of wage-workers regarded the organisation as a sort of militant Trade Union).

The position of the Ulster peasantry was different from that of their comrades of the South. They were descendants of men who had come over to Ireland under a definite agreement that their homesteads and farms were theirs so long as they paid the agreed rent. When they discovered that the undertakers, at the expiration of their leases, insisted on huge rent increases because of the improvements due to their sweat and toil, the peasants resisted furiously. Sporadic village and county struggles took place from 1727, but as the exactions of the undertakers became more intolerable with the years, the peasants soon "found that without definite and vigorous organisation in the interests of the people the rent exactions and dissolute lords of the country would lay year by year heavier burdens on their shoulders and

drive them into a deeper and more hopeless poverty.”<sup>10</sup> The Hearts of Steel arose on the estate of the Earl of Donegal in the county of Antrim, and in a short time had won the entire peasantry of Antrim and Down to their ranks. The Oakboys, a less formidable movement, embraced the counties of Monaghan, Armagh and Tyrone.

Jamie Hope, the proletarian hero of the Society of United Irishmen, has given a vivid picture of the operations of the Steelboy bands. “Each of these bands,” he says, “conferred the name of ‘Captain’ on a resolute leader. If they went to burn a house their captain’s name was ‘firebrand’; if to cut the corn on a farm that had been taken over another’s head—as was their expression—before it was ripe his name was ‘long-scythe.’ He also used to toss out hay to the rain when the weather was likely to ensure its destruction—his name then was ‘pitchfork.’”<sup>11</sup>

No sooner did the power of the Hearts of Steel and Oakboys make itself felt than a wail of indignation and outraged Christianity rose from landlord and parson. “It was quite legal,” says Biggar, in the work quoted, “that these self-created ‘landlords’ should combine in every conceivable way to advance their interests; should boycott tenants individually, and also as religious or political classes; should burn their homesteads, and

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<sup>10</sup> F. J. Biggar: *The Ulster Land War of 1770*. Dublin, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> R. R. Madden: *Lives and Times of the United Irishmen*, Vol. I.



batter down their wall steadings; should drive their cattle; should throw their goods, gear and plenishings on the public road; should cast them adrift with their wives and children, threatening the same treatment to any who would give them shelter; should do all this, aye, and, as high sheriffs, hang them on the gallows surrounded with hundreds of military guns and bayonets 'aiding and abetting.' Let but the tenants meet or combine, and that golden idol, 'private property' (ever, when a landlord's, more sacred than the very life of a tenant) was attacked, and no name was too bad for them—malicious, designing, riotous, tumultuous, treasonable."

The Presbyterian clergy of Templepatrick in 1771 issued a "serious address and admonition" to those "Sons of Satan, the Hearts of Steel." "Are not your practices contradictory to the laws of nature; to our present happy constitution; to the allegiance due to the best of kings?" they cried pathetically. "Let no such things be known among you; but in all Godliness and honesty lead quiet and peaceable lives as becometh those who possess the religion of the meek and holy Jesus"!

Two incidents of the Ulster struggle show the intensity with which the classes fought. On December 21, 1770, David Douglas, the Templepatrick leader, was arrested in Belfast and jailed in the military barracks. The alarm was sounded, and the Steelboys determined to rescue their leader. "On Sunday, the 23rd, a band of them marched to Templepatrick meeting-place while service was being held, and summoned their comrades to join them. It is said they rapped the butts of their

rifles against the door, calling the men to come out, as that was no place for men at such a time, but might do for the women.”<sup>12</sup> A Belfast historian tells the rest of the story as follows<sup>13</sup>: “Provided with offensive weapons, several thousands of peasants proceeded to the town to rescue the prisoner, who was removed to the barrack and placed under a guard of soldiers. Shortly after the Steelboys arrived, and pressed forward to the barrack, and several shots were actually exchanged between them and the soldiers. The consequence, in all probability, would have been fatal to many on both sides, and to the town, had not a physician of highly respectable character and leading influence interposed, at the risk of his life, and prevailed with those concerned to set the prisoner at liberty. Being delivered up to his associates, they marched off in triumph.”

It is obvious from our respectable bourgeois historian that the Northern capitalists received a severe shaking from this storming of their capital in broad daylight.

Two years later the county of Down was the scene of an exciting episode. Richard Johnson, an impoverished squireen, of Gilford, was an inveterate enemy of the people, and he had had several sanguinary brushes with the Hearts of Steel. On March 5, 1772, Johnson received word of a meeting of delegates in the townland of Clare. Arming the band of followers he had trained, he rode post-haste to the meeting-place and captured four

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<sup>12</sup> Biggar: *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> George Benn: *History of Belfast*, 1823.

of the delegates. By evening 2,000 infuriated peasants had surrounded Johnson's house, demanding the release of their comrades. The landlord had twenty-three men, and they replied with repeated volleys until their ammunition was done. The battle lasted half an hour, then Johnson hoisted the white flag. The landlord barely escaped with his life; Samuel Morrell, a local dissenting minister who was bearing a musket in defence of private property, was riddled by his angry flock. Willie Redmond, leader of the people, was tried, but two juries refused to convict. Some months later Johnson murdered him in cold blood.

The grand flush of Ulster paled with the end of 1772. But the peasantry had learnt their own strength, and tenant right and other concessions had been won. "They carried on their agitation in the face of all the power of vested interest and of the governing class, and without their vital struggle and enormous sacrifice Ulster tenant right and the Ulster customs would never have become a reality, and the remnants of a strong agricultural class would have dwindled to mere serfs, without any rights or claims on the houses they built and the lands they cultivated. More than that, their actions drove a fear into the undertakers—a fear of a force they never dared or wished to face again. . . ."<sup>14</sup> In the succeeding century, it was forgotten how the peasant farmers of Ulster had won tenant right.

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<sup>14</sup> Biggar: *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER TWO

### *RIBBONMEN AND THE HUNGER*

THE plans of Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen for a national rising went awry in 1798. The French expeditions which were to assist failed, comfortable, well-to-do leaders shirked or played the traitor, and it was left to the peasants and hand-loom weavers to provide the backbone of the insurrection. The best of the Ulster weavers and artisans were members of the United Irish Society, while the organisation of the Catholic peasantry, the Defenders, which had been formed in defence against the Orange gangs of the Government and landlords, had also merged with the greater movement. The story of the heroic local battles in Wexford, Antrim and elsewhere is well known; it is unnecessary to re-tell it here. Henry Joy McCracken's cry before his execution concentrates the lesson of 'ninety-eight: "The rich always betray the poor."

The end of the anti-Jacobin War in 1815 saw the Irish peasants plunged into misery again. For a few years there had been a kind of pitiful prosperity for them, for the industrial revolution in England was extending the agrarian market there, and "the war in Europe, though occasionally interrupted by short seasons of armed peace, maintained a good price for all kinds of agricultural produce, because the British Government was constantly obliged to victual great fleets and garrisons in all

quarters of the world.”<sup>1</sup> And the enfranchisement of the Catholics in 1793 gave some little security against eviction, for every tenant added to the voting power of the landlord. With the end of the war, however, the bubble prosperity burst; war prices dropped, but the ridiculously high war rents remained as before, while the burden of tithes and taxes grew ever more crushing.

The secret societies of the peasantry sprung into being again, now directing their main fire at the parsons' tithes. Continually, the peasantry saw part of their crops being carried away by the grinding tithe proctors; their answer was a semi-secret society named the Threshers. The Threshers fought valiantly; twelve were executed in the autumn of 1806 in County Mayo alone, and others suffered death in Roscommon, Galway and Longford. After the Threshers came the Ribbonmen, perhaps the most famous of all the early fighting organisations of the Irish peasantry. “A secret agricultural trades union of labourers and cottier farmers—a trades union which undertook in its own wild way to exert justice upon the evicter and vengeance upon the traitor to his fellows.” So Connolly has called the Ribbon Society.

The panacea of the British ruling class for the distress and “outrages” was, as always, more exterminations and Coercion Acts at the rate of one a year. The former received another impulse from that impudent fraud, the Emancipation of the Catholics, in 1829. In this, blustering, demagogic Daniel O’Connell achieved his crowning

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<sup>1</sup> John Mitchel: *History of Ireland*.

triumph: the way to pelf and place was opened to wealthy Catholics by the sacrifice of the forty-shilling freeholders. With the disfranchisement of the small farmers went their last safeguard against eviction, for the landlords had no further electoral use for them.

The tithe war came to an end in the 'thirties. On June 15, 1831, the little town of Newtownbarry, at the foot of Mount Leinster, on the border between Wexford and County Carlow, was the scene of a bloody episode. The Rev. Mr. M'Clintock, with the aid of the police and yeomanry, had seized the crops and goods of several persons, and was to auction them that day. The people flocked to the town, and so fierce was their opposition that no purchasers could be found. "At last the police attacked the unarmed multitudes; were seconded with great alacrity by the yeomanry; and very soon thirteen slain men and twenty wounded were lying in their blood in Newtownbarry. No person was ever brought to punishment for this slaughter."<sup>a</sup> Six months later came the battle of Carrickshoek, in Kilkenny. Protected by a large force of armed police, a process-server was making his round with his sheaf of hated documents. A big demonstration of peasants followed him menacingly from cabin to cabin, and on the desolate common of Carrickshoek they fell upon him and his guard. The people were armed with short pikes and they made good use of them: eleven constables were killed, although, unfortunately, a number of the toilers fell also. The

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<sup>a</sup> John Mitchel: *Ibid.*

carnage at Rathcormack, a village in Waterford County, on December 18, 1834, was the most important of all. Police and military carrying away a poor widow's stack found their way out of the boreen blocked by a barricade and held by the peasants of the neighbourhood. After parleys and the reading of the Riot Act, a volley was poured upon the people and many were killed and wounded. "Eye-witnesses," says Connolly, "declared that the poor farmers and labourers engaged stood the charge and volleys of the soldiers as firmly as if they had been seasoned troops, a fact that impressed the Government more than a million speeches would have done."

So the Tithes Commutation Act was passed, and the collecting of tithes gave place to a subtler method—the tithe was added to the rent, and the landlord collected the parson's pound of flesh with his own. The professional patriots through the whole of the magnificent struggle proved themselves as bitter enemies of the rural toilers as was the British ruling class. Daniel O'Connell declared that "these miscreants—who, with a horrid depravity, do not hesitate to abuse the most holy sacrament by partaking of it with the intention of making it a means the more effectually to betray—are working with a deep and malignant villainy to prevail upon the wretched peasantry to continue and revive the system of Ribbonism."<sup>3</sup> And Connolly has placed it on record that:

"For the Catholic clergy it is enough to say that

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel O'Connell: *Speeches*, Vol. II. Dublin, 1860.

while this tithe war was being waged they were almost universally silent about that 'grievous sin of secret conspiracy' upon which they are usually so eloquent. We would not dare to say that they recognised that as the secret societies were doing their work against a rival priesthood, it was better to be sparing in their denunciations for the time being; perhaps that is not the explanation, but at all events it is noteworthy that as soon as the tithe war was won all the old stock invectives against every kind of extra constitutional action were renewed."<sup>4</sup>

From the tithe war to *an Gorta Mor*, the Great Famine, and 'Forty-eight, the fight of the peasantry became definitely a part of the national struggle against the British domination that was sucking the life's blood of Ireland. The localised struggles merged into a challenge to the central power, albeit on a constitutional plane at first. The Famine not only burst through the constitutional quackeries of O'Connell; it gave both peasantry and the young Irish proletariat an object-lesson in the treachery and cowardice of the Irish capitalists: the fight was betrayed then as it has been betrayed in every generation down to our own day.

The condition of the poor farmers and labourers before the famine can be glimpsed from the two bulky volumes forming the *Digest of Evidence* given before the Commission on the Occupation of Land, presided over by Lord Devon. This Commission began its work in 1844; it was composed entirely of landlords, and its chairman

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<sup>4</sup> James Connolly: *Ibid.*



was an absentee! "You might as well," sneered O'Connell, "consult butchers about keeping Lent as consult these men about the rights of farmers." But though the purpose of the Commission was to assist in the "consolidations" and the transformation of the Irish peasantry into propertyless proletarians, its report was compelled to give some few facts exposing the terrible conditions of the countryfolk. The *Digest* (the first volume was not published until 1847) reveals that there were 192,368 families living on farms of from one to seven acres. Live stock was held by the classes as follows:<sup>5</sup>

AVERAGE VALUE OF LIVE STOCK UPON IRISH FARMS

1-5 acres	5-15 acres	15-30 acres	Above 30 acres
£	£	£	£
9.8	22.6	46.4	142.8

Witnesses described to the Commission the plight of the small tenant farmers.<sup>6</sup> "They are miserably off," said the Rev. James Porter, Presbyterian minister, of County Down. "For the most part their condition is very low and not getting better," said Mr. Benjamin Cox, farmer, of Clare. Mr. William O'Flynn, farmer, of Tipperary, denied that they were "getting richer." "They are wretchedly poor," he asserted. The Rev. George Gearty, P.P., of Leitrim, was of the opinion that they could not "be worse off than they are." Another Catholic clergyman, Rev. Richard Buggy, of Queen's

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Census report for 1843.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

County (now Laoghise), described their food: "Potatoes and milk, and very often meal in the summer. They do not generally have potatoes enough to supply them through the year, and they go in debt for meal during the summer time. They get meal at an exorbitant price by passing their notes for it." Dr. James Swan, a Donegal dispensary surgeon, told a like story: potatoes were their "usual food, and sometimes they get what they call a sprit or sprat, or salt fish. I am intimately acquainted with their diet, and it is a fruitful source of chronic disease. Very few of that class are able to get milk; they are steeped in poverty; and though many of them go to the market with their outside garments good, their under-garments are bundles of rags." A vivid picture of the life and conditions of the Gaelic speakers of Tirconnail was etched by one of their landlords, Lord George Hill:

"It often happens that one man has three dwellings—one in the mountain, another upon the shore, the third upon an island, he and his family flitting from one to the other according as the herbage is thought to be beneficial to the sheep and cattle, at times supposed to have a disease requiring a change of pasture, in reality more food. This change usually takes place on a fixed day; the junior branches of the family generally perform the land journey on the top of the household goods with which the mountain pony is loaded, the churn slung on one side of the animal, into which the youngest child is often thrust, its head being the only part visible. Owing to this Arab mode of life no pains are taken by

the owners to make any one of these habitations comfortable. They consist of four walls built with large rough stones, put together with mud instead of mortar; no chimney, a front and back door; a window with no glass, only a shutter; for thatch they use heather or bent: one or two wooden stools, an iron potato pot, a tin drinking cup, a crazy bedstead filled up with heather and potatoes, little more than rags for bed-clothes, a churn, two or three piggins, a spade and a shovel make up the furniture of a mountain cabin, half of which, without any division, is given up to the cattle; no attempt is made at a garden or yard or at any kind of outhouse. The people are a quiet inoffensive race and naturally kind and civil in their manners; many do not understand English, particularly the women; they dislike sending their children from home; are sociable and friendly, great talkers, and sit up half the night in winter talking and telling stories, firing being plentiful. They dislike living in detached houses, which they consider lonely."

Not everybody, of course, admitted to the Commission that the tenant farmers were in a bad way. It would not do for all the landlords to confess to hungry tenants and growing rent-rolls, for there was more than a suspicion among the country people that a certain connection existed between the two. William Sherrard, Esq., "land agent to properties situated in several counties in Ireland," therefore not only was convinced of the prosperous state of his serfs, but triumphantly brought proof of it: "They are so comfortable that they keep their pig and eat him."!

The few tenant farmers permitted to give evidence apparently were unaware of such cases of opulence as that depicted by the worthy Mr. Sherrard. Peter Mohun, a Monaghan tenant, said his neighbours were striving to pay the rent, "but only striving. The people on the townland I live in have ten acres among them all. You see my condition. I am the best man that can pay the rent in the townland, and this is the best suit of clothes I wear." Arthur M'Daniel, also of Monaghan, whose family earned a few shillings with their hand-loom, was asked if he could afford his rent. "I could not pay the rent only by what I am earning. The land is stiff and cold land." As for his diet: "Potatoes and salt is the common food I have, except a little milk. Very seldom any stirabout, till the latter end of the summer, when the potatoes become scarce." Patrick Garvey, of the same county, was asked about his food. He hesitated. "It is a shame to tell it to gentlemen like you. Sometimes we cannot get salt to the potatoes—that is sore enough; but for milk, we need not think to have it this year, barring some of the neighbours give us a drop for God's sake." Aye, poor Patrick Garvey, in his rags and hat in hand, had too great delicacy of mind to want to reveal his poverty to these overfed landlords sitting across the table from him; or perhaps he realised that this Commission did not need to be told of the barbarities he and his were enduring. But the landlords would not let hard-pressed Pat out of the room without doing something for him. The following conversation ensued:

"Has it ever occurred to you that you would be better

in the poorhouse here?—That would be the last thing I would do. Whatever the Lord will do for me outside, I will never enter that if I can help it.

“What are your objections to the poorhouse?—The neighbours will not let me starve. I can get plenty to eat in the world, and straw to lie on at night, and I will have that much pleasure.”

It will be seen how beggarly were the conditions of thousands of small farmers even before the famine. But in addition to the peasants, there were thousands of labourers, men almost divorced from the soil, who sold their labour-power where they could and eked out an existence, in many cases, with a potato patch taken in con-acre. These labourers received from 4d. to 6d. a day “with kitchen,” and, where food was not included, from 6d. to 10d. a day in winter and from 10d. to one shilling and nine pence a day in summer. Many months in the year they could not find work at all, and they roamed the roads begging. Here is James Carey, labourer, of Longford, giving evidence before the Commission :

“How many meals in a day have your family generally?—Three.

“Take the breakfast, what have they for breakfast?—Potatoes and milk, unless we chance to buy a hundred of meal, then they have stirabout when the potatoes get bad.

“Do the children ever get a herring, or anything of that kind?—Yes, when we have a penny to buy it, or a sup of gruel to take with the potatoes.

"Do you ever get any butter?—No.

"How often in the year do you eat meat?—We never get meat except a bit at Christmas that would last us for a week. We may chance to buy half a pound of bacon on a market day. . . ."

Other witnesses from all classes of society added their testimony. "They are in the most wretched condition," said Mr. George O'Callaghan, landlord, of Clare; "they are completely out of employment for four months of the year, sometimes five." "The most miserable man in the world is the tenant labourer," said Mr. James Galway, land agent, Waterford. Mr. Edward Golding, land agent, Monaghan, stated that the usual rent was "about £2 for a cabin and a mere patch of garden; but whenever sickness or anything of that kind attacks the labourer he is almost invariably obliged to leave his cabin, and his family become beggars or go into the work-house." A striking piece of information came from Sir John Macneill, a civil engineer in charge of road schemes in Louth and other parts of the country. He had employed a number of tenant labourers on road jobs and found that "when they first came to work upon scanty meat they have not the physical strength necessary. Sometimes they are knocked up from that and get ill; in other cases where they have the means and eat meat, *not being accustomed to it before they are also made ill*; so that in general for a few weeks when they first commence work they are unable to do much."

Starving and naked as they were, and flung on to the roadside in thousands by the merciless "consolidations,"

little wonder that the country folk combined to resist bailiffs, landlords and land-grabbers. Agrarian "outrages" were growing year by year, and the Devon Commission, as became a body of landlords, were deeply interested in "outrages" and fearful lest they became even more common. A whole section of the *Digest* is taken up with evidence on "outrages." There is room here for only a few samples. Mr. John Cahill, crown prosecutor (and land agent!) for Tipperary, was "perfectly convinced that there is no agrarian outrage committed, but that the inhabitants about know all the circumstances and the parties concerned . . . it is almost utterly impossible to get at the evidence." Lieut.-Col. William Miller, deputy-inspector-general of police, exhibited a notice fastened to a land-grabber's gate at Rathcoole, County Dublin: "We rite these few lines to warn you of the sword that does continue to tremble over you for the takeing too acres of land that was in possession of a widow; and if you take land that was forcibly taken mark what will follow; land taken against a tenant's will must remain by with the landlord or be commons for fourteen years—Moll Doyle's sons awoke from their slumber." Short and grim was the story told by one John Horan, a farmer, of County Clare: "A man was murdered there some time ago. The man had between thirty and forty acres of land. He was not satisfied with that, but turned out twenty or thirty for the sake of getting all the land for himself, and that man was murdered." From Nenagh came Mr. John Kennedy, shopkeeper, to tell in true Pecksniffian fashion of the

unfortunate fate of one Gleeson, a land-grabber. This Gleeson had already been shot but had recovered, and two peasants had been transported for the shooting. Then one Sunday he went into the town to the chapel. The police who were guarding him left him almost at the chapel door. "The road was quite thronged with people going from the first Mass; he came into the second; he was in a crowd and a man followed him up and shot him on the road quite convenient to the town. The priest ran out and told them the monstrous act they had committed and the enormity of the crime; and I happened to be coming up the road where the chapel is; I heard the country people there talking—some of them saying it was a bad thing, and I heard some of them openly declare it was a pity that they did not shoot the priest himself—how dare he interfere?" The Commissioners were horrified. "Is that feeling general among the lower classes?" they asked. "Yes, it is with those people; they do not go near the priest at all; they do not go to confession or to Mass; if they do, it is for other purposes. When turned out of the land they get demoralised and frantic and savage and wild; and they go idle about, and congregate together, and meet at wakes and combine. I think the farmers shelter those people guilty of outrages through the country under the fear that if the intimidation were not to continue they would be ejected and turned out."

And then, to crown all this, famine, smouldering in 1845, burst into torturing flame in '46 and '47. The details of that nation-wide slaughter are burned into the



mind of Ireland. In three years, it is estimated, a million and a half persons died from hunger and hunger-fever. And, be it never forgotten, they died in the midst of abundance their own hands had created—died while their produce (for only the potato had failed) was floating on every tide to Britain—died while, “singular to relate, that city (Dublin) had never before been so gay and luxurious; splendid equipages had never before so crowded the streets; and the theatres and concert-rooms had never been filled with such brilliant throngs.”<sup>7</sup> One picture only of what the Divine Right of Private Property brought the Irish toilers to in the famine. It is the account of William Bennett of his visit to Belmullet, in the County Mayo:<sup>8</sup>

“My hand trembles while I write. The scenes of human misery and degradation we witnessed still haunt my imagination with the vividness and power of some horrid and tyrannous delusion rather than the features of a sober reality.

“We entered a cabin. Stretched in one dark corner, scarcely visible from the rags and smoke that covered them, were three children huddled together, lying there because they were too weak to rise, pale and ghastly, their little limbs, on removing a portion of the filthy covering, perfectly emaciated, eyes sunk, voice gone, and evidently in the last stages of actual starvation. Crouched

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<sup>7</sup> John Mitchel: *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)*, Dublin.

<sup>8</sup> Society of Friends: *Transactions During the Famine*. London, 1848.

over the turf embers was another form, wild and all but naked, scarcely human in appearance. It stirred not, nor noticed us. On some straw, sodden upon the ground, moaning piteously, was a shrivelled old woman, imploring us to give her something—baring her limbs partly to show how the skin hung loose from the bones.

“Above her, on something like a ledge, was a young woman with sunken cheeks—a mother I have no doubt—who scarcely raised her eyes in answer to our enquiries, but pressed her hand upon her forehead with a look of unutterable anguish and despair. Many cases were widows whose husbands had been taken off by the fever, and thus their only pittance, obtained from the public works, was entirely cut off. In many the husbands or sons were prostrate under that horrid disease—the results of long-continued famine and low living—in which first the limbs and then the body swell most frightfully and finally burst. We entered upwards of fifty of these tenements. The scene was invariably the same, differing in little but the number of sufferers or of the groups occupying the several corners within. The whole number was often not to be distinguished until—the eye having adapted itself to the darkness—they were pointed out, or were heard, or some filthy bundle of rags and straw was perceived to move. Perhaps the poor children presented the most piteous and heartrending spectacle. Many were too weak to stand, their little limbs attenuated—except where the frightful swelling had taken the place of previous emaciation. Every infantile expression had de-

parted and in some, reason and intelligence had flown. Many were remnants of families, crowded together in one cabin; orphaned little relatives taken in by the equally destitute, and even strangers, for these poor people are kind to one another to the end. In one cabin was a sister, just dying, lying by the side of her little brother, just dead. I have worse than this to relate, but it is useless to multiply details, and they are in fact unfit. They did but rarely complain. When we enquired what was the matter the answer was alike in all: '*Tha shein ukrosh—indeed the hunger.*'"

Ireland was writhing in torture. But the English bourgeoisie had an infallible specific for the Starvation. The industrial middle class of England in 1846 shouldered their way to the political power that had been held by the financial oligarchy and the landlords since the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688. From the end of the anti-Jacobin War, the landlords had bolstered up their fantastic profits by a series of Corn Laws which protected the English market from foreign competition. The industrial capitalists had campaigned for years against these "taxes on the people's food," and had spent thousands of pounds in enlightening the English workers as to the beneficent results that would flow from Free Trade. The British workers themselves had no illusions about the capitalists' concern for "cheap food"; the revolutionary working-class organisation of the period, the Chartists, exposed the whole sham and revealed the real reason for this bourgeois philanthropy, so conspicuously absent in issues touching, say, wages or working hours.

The Chartists showed that the whole purpose of the Free Trade campaign was to lower the price of flour and bread in order to afford an excuse for reducing wages. The years after 1846 proved how correct were the Chartists.

But Free Trade came; Bright and Peel were determined to "cheapen the people's food," and English and Irish corn was no longer protected in the British market, but had to meet the competition of America and Europe. The policy of Free Trade, with its inevitable destruction of Ireland as a grain-producing country, gave a "new content" to British rule in Ireland, as Marx saw, and provided the basis for the Irish landlords' war of extermination during the next four decades. But with the effrontery so typical of the English bourgeoisie, Sir Robert Peel actually advanced the state of Ireland under the famine as a further argument for Free Trade. "Shall we exclude any kind of food from our ports," he cried, "while the Irish are starving?" This, when the whole trouble with Ireland was that its ports were *open*—open to all the ships carrying away to England the produce of the starving Irish peasantry! The English bourgeoisie would not willingly see the Irish country folk starve to death if Free Trade could save them!

And the reaction of the classes to this unspeakable carnage? 'Forty-eight branded the Irish bourgeoisie with yet another of its many shameful brands of cowardice and treachery. As the hunger-scorched months went by, the O'Connellite leaders of native capitalism could only whimper of Repeal; while the petty-

bourgeois "revolutionists" of the *Nation*, the makers of well-rounded patriotic essays, the singers of perfervid battle ballads, avoided with eager determination the one thing that could have saved Ireland—a revolutionary attack on the existing property rights.

One voice alone was raised to cry out to Ireland the way out of the inferno—the thunder-tone of James Fintan Lalor. Lalor was a true voice of the starving peasantry, a true revolutionist. He was born in Leix, in 1808, the eldest son of a tenant farmer with a middle-sized holding. Until 1847 this deformed little peasant with the razor-keen mind and vitriolic pen was unknown. He had never joined the Repeal Association, being fully aware of its class limitations. But the Hunger brought him from his townland horizon to be the champion of his class throughout Ireland.

In his first letters to the *Nation*, Lalor saw clearly what was taking place: the wiping out of the Irish peasantry and the conversion of the dispossessed survivors into "free" wage-slaves of capitalism. Pointing out how the small tenants were losing their holdings, he wrote: "They lose this land; they acquire, in lieu of it, that valuable species of Irish property, 'independent labour.' Stop one moment to look at the fact. Five hundred thousand families added to the two hundred and thirty thousand who form the present mass of labour—six hundred and seventy thousand adult males converted into 'independent labourers'—six hundred and seventy thousand added to those three hundred and nineteen thousand already so successfully engaged in

independent labour. . . . It is the policy and purpose of every act that is passing through the legislature. . . . Ireland will become a pasture ground once again, as it was before, and its agricultural population of tillage farmers and labourers will decay and die out by degrees, or vanish and become extinct at once. . . .”

But though the “brooding brain,” as Standish O’Grady has called him, saw this, he did not see at once that the landowning aristocracy must be broken as a class if the Irish peasantry were to be saved. He was soon driven to this conclusion, and even before John Mitchel sailed for the West Indies in the convict hulk, there had been an end to appeals to the landlords from Lalor. Class war to the knife, and revolution, national and social, were the policy of the *Irish Felon*, which he now edited in place of Mitchel’s *United Irishman*.

In passionate phrases, he tried, in the first number of the *Felon*, to impress on the national leaders the necessity of linking up the agrarian revolution with the struggle for Repeal.

“A mightier question moves Ireland to-day than that of merely repealing the Act of Union,” he cried. “Not the constitution that Wolfe Tone died to abolish, but the constitution that Tone died to obtain—independence; full and absolute independence for this island, and for every man within this island. Into no movement that would leave an enemy’s garrison in possession of all our lands, masters of our liberties, our lives, and all our means of life and happiness—into no such movement will a single man of the greycoats enter with an

armed hand, whatever the town population may do. On a wider fighting field, with stronger positions and greater resources than are afforded by the paltry question of Repeal, must we close for our final struggle with England, or sink and surrender. Ireland her own—Ireland her own, and all therein, from the sod to the sky. The soil of Ireland for the people of Ireland, to have and hold from God alone who gave—to have and to hold to them and their heirs for ever, without suit or service, faith or fealty, rent or render, to any power under heaven. From a worse bondage than the bondage of any foreign government—from a dominion more grievous and grinding than the dominion of England in its worst days—from the cruellest tyranny that ever yet held its vulture clutch on the body and soul of a country—from the robber rights and robber rule that have turned us into slaves and beggars in the land which God gave us for ours—Deliverance, oh Lord, Deliverance or Death—Deliverance, or this land a desert.”

And in reply to the defenders of private property “rights,” he hurls his defiance :

“I acknowledge no right of property in a small class which goes to abrogate the rights of a numerous people. I acknowledge no right of property in eight thousand persons, be they noble or ignoble, which takes away all rights of property, security, independence, and existence itself, from a population of eight millions and stands in bar to all the political rights of the island, and all the social rights of its inhabitants. I acknowledge no right of property which takes the food of millions, and gives

them a famine—which denies to the peasant the right of a home, and concedes in exchange, the right of a workhouse. I deny and challenge all such rights, howsoever founded or enforced. I challenge them, as founded only on the code of the brigand, and enforced only by the sanction of the hangman. Against them I assert the true and indefeasable right of property—the right of our people to live in it in comfort, security, and independence, and to live in it by their own labour, on their own land, as God and nature meant them to do.”

It is, however, in his famous article, “The Faith of a Felon,”<sup>9</sup> that Lalor lays down most explicitly the one policy that in 'Forty-eight could have brought Ireland to freedom and her peasantry out of the valley of the shadow of death. He first exposes the class timorousness of the young Irishmen. “I endeavoured to show that they were only keeping up a feeble and ineffectual fire from a foolish distance, upon the *English government*, which stands out of reach and beyond our power; and urged them to wheel their batteries round and bend them on the *English garrison* of landlords, who stand here within our hands, scattered, isolated, and helpless, girded round by the might of a people. Except two or three of them, all refused at the time, and have persisted in refusing until now. *They wanted an alliance with the landowners. They chose to consider them as Irishmen, and imagined they could induce them to hoist the green flag. They wished to preserve an Aristocracy.*

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<sup>9</sup> *Irish Felon*, July 8, 1848.



*They desired, not a democratic, but a merely national revolution. . . .* Had the Confederation, in the May or June of '47, thrown heart and mind and means and might into the movement I pointed out, they would have made it successful, and settled for once and for ever all quarrels and questions between us and England. . . .

"The opinions I then stated, and which I yet stand firm to, are these:—

"1. That in order to save their own lives, the occupying tenants of the soil of Ireland ought, next autumn, to refuse all rent and arrears of rent then due, beyond and except the value of the overplus of harvest produce remaining in their hands after having deducted and reserved a due and full provision for their own subsistence during the next ensuing twelve months.

"2. That they ought to refuse and resist being made beggars, landless and houseless under the English law of ejectment.

"3. That they ought further, *on principle*, to refuse ALL rent to the usurping proprietors, until the people, the true proprietors (or lords paramount, in legal parlance), have, in national congress, or convention, decided *what* rents they are to pay, and *to whom* they are to pay them.

"4. And that the people, on grounds of *policy* and *economy*, ought to decide (as a general rule, admitting of reservations) that those rents shall be paid *to themselves*, the people, for public purposes, and for behoof and benefit of them, the entire general people."

Thus, he pointed out, "a mighty social revolution is accomplished, and the foundations of a national revolution surely laid." For, following acceptance of this policy, the peasantry must immediately begin "to try to keep our harvest, to offer a peaceful, passive<sup>10</sup> resistance, to barricade the island, to break up the roads, to break down the bridges—and, should need be, and favourable occasions offer, surely we may venture to try the steel."

The close of the articles contains the paragraph of vision that caused James Connolly to hail Lalor as the "peerless thinker" of '48, who offered "principles of action and of society which have within them not only the best plan of campaign suited for the needs of a country seeking its freedom through insurrection against a dominant nation, but also held the seeds of the more perfect social peace of the future."<sup>11</sup>

"It has been said to me that such a war, on the principles I propose, would be looked on with detestation by Europe. I assert the contrary: I say that such a war would propagate itself throughout Europe. Mark the words of this prophecy—the principle I propound goes to the very foundations of Europe, and sooner or later, will cause Europe to uprise. Mankind will yet be masters of the earth. The right of the people to make the laws—

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<sup>10</sup> Lalor writes here with his tongue in his cheek, for his sting, like the German verb, is always in his tail. The last part of the sentence annuls his "passive resistance" as the third of his four points annuls the possibility of paying any rent at all, suggested in his first point.

<sup>11</sup> Connolly: *Ibid.*

this produced the first great modern earthquake, whose latest shocks, even now, are heaving in the heart of the world. The right of the people to own the land—this will produce the next. Train your hands, and your sons' hands, gentlemen of the earth, for you and they will yet have to use them."

This was the road pointed out by Fintan Lalor. John Mitchel, the one hero of the period, an eagle in a flock of screaming gulls, took up his policy; the peasantry were ready, the city proletarians were ready, "the country was beginning to bristle with pikes"; and Young Ireland led the masses to the tragi-comedy of the Widow McCormack's cabbage garden!

After '48 began the clearances advocated by the Devon Commission (the Famine was deliberately used by the landlords and Government to clear the peasantry from the land: Poor Law relief was refused to anyone owning more than a quarter of an acre; thousands of small farmers, therefore, gave up their little holdings). By 1865 the population of Ireland had fallen to five and a half millions. Karl Marx, in *Capital*, records that:

"Between May, 1851, and July, 1865, the number of emigrants from Ireland was 1,591,487, more than half a million of whom emigrated during the five-year period 1861 to 1865. In the decade 1851 to 1861, the total number of inhabited houses declined by 52,990. During the same decade, the number of holdings over 30 acres increased by 109,000, while the total number of farms decreased by 120,000, this falling-off being exclusively

due to the disappearance of holdings under fifteen acres. Thus there was a centralisation of agriculture."

The process of centralisation was hastened by the Encumbered Estates Act which had been passed in 1851. By this measure, the inheritor of an entailed estate "encumbered" with debt was enabled to compound with his creditors by surrendering part of the estate at a valuation. The Act was thus designed to dispose of the older breed of planters, who had sunk into a state of lethargy, and whose riotous extravagance at the expense of their tenants had left them penniless, in the grip of money-lenders, and incapable of any social progress. English capitalism proposed to replace these drones by Irish capitalist landlords or English merchants, who would be able more efficiently to extirpate the Irish peasantry. The Act served its purpose, for though few British capitalists ventured the peril of Captain Moonlight, Irish middlemen who had enriched themselves at the expense both of lord and tenant serfs, were able to step into their masters' shoes. Four years after the passing of the Act, Marx wrote thus of the changes in Irish agriculture :<sup>12</sup>

"This revolution consists in the Irish agrarian system yielding to the English. *The system of small tenantry is being replaced by big*—just as the old landlords are being replaced by *new capitalists*. The chief stages making way for this change are : the famine of 1847 which killed about one million Irish; emigration to America and

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx : *Neue Oder Zeitung*. Article, 1855.

Australia, which has already torn another million souls out of Ireland and which continues to uproot fresh millions; the unsuccessful revolt of 1848, breaking Ireland's last faith in itself; finally, the Act of Parliament which condemned to auction the property of indebted Irish nobility and drove that nobility from off the land just as starvation drove off the farmers, tenants and cottagers."

So the agricultural revolution was effected. The transformation of tillage into pasture, the introduction of machinery and economy in the use of labour drove hundreds of thousands of rural toilers overseas and depopulated Ireland, created a large distinct class of wage-earners having no means of support but the sale of their labour-power, and forced up rents and farming profits year by year. Ireland, in Marx's biting words, was on the way to the fulfilment of her "true mission—that of being a sheep-walk and a cattle-pasture for England."

### CHAPTER THREE

## *FENIANISM AND THE LAND LEAGUE*

OUT of the ashes of the levelled cabins that now blackened the Irish countryside sprang a phoenix that was to "put the heart across" the English bourgeoisie for many a year. In Connacht and Munster the Ribbon lodges, the "rough and ready roving boys," were again coming into being and from behind hedges the peasant blunderbuss was making a heroic if pitiful stand against the clearances. The countryside was desolate; the towns, possessing scarcely any industry, were affected acutely by the rural poverty and the workers were striking and demonstrating militantly.

This is not a history of Ireland's liberation struggle, and a detailed account of the Fenian movement is unnecessary. But all through the nineteenth century agrarian distress and agitation were the basis of the national fight and Fenianism was, through the Ribbon lodges, the child of the Great Hunger.

At Skibbereen in 1858 there was a band of young men who met regularly to discuss political and bookish questions. They called themselves the Phoenix National and Literary Society; Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa was their leader. This society provided the starting point of the shortlived Phoenix Conspiracy. James Stephens, who as a young man had been "out" in '48 and who had since mixed widely with revolutionary groups in America and

on the Continent, returned to Ireland with the purpose of harnessing the widespread discontent. On a tour of investigation, Stephens fell in with Rossa and his friends and impressed them with his idea of a vast underground organisation that in its own good time would rise up and deliver a sharp and decisive blow at Sean Buidhe. So a new secret society was launched and many of the peasants of the neighbourhood were sworn in by Rossa.

The Castle struck almost immediately, and the method by which the society was crushed is rich in lessons for the Irish workers and working farmers to-day. A. M. Sullivan, the national reformist and clerical politician, tells the story in his reminiscences.<sup>1</sup> The Bishop of Kerry, Dr. Moriarty, was in Dublin. A member of the C.I.D. interviewed him and there was a discussion, the terms of which can be guessed, and the following morning the Bishop waited on Sullivan and asked him to attack the Phœnix in the *Nation*, Sullivan's organ. Simultaneously with the *Nation's* tirades there was a flood of anathemas from every altar in Kerry. The next move lay with the Government.<sup>2</sup> The police descended upon the leaders of the movement, one of them named Daniel O'Sullivan was sentenced to ten years' penal servitude, and the others were acquitted. It was the end of the Phœnix, but the Castle and the Bishops did not

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<sup>1</sup> A. M. Sullivan: *New Ireland*, London, 1882.

<sup>2</sup> Almost precisely the same tactics secured a deportation order against Jim Gralton, a Leitrim working farmer, a few months ago.

know that it was but the offshoot of a much more dangerous movement.

James Stephens believed that freedom could be won by a secret society, and on March 17, 1858, a group of men had met in Dublin to form the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or, as the I.R.B. men soon called themselves popularly, the Fenians. The Fenian movement in many ways reached a higher political level than any struggle that had preceded it during the century. Marx had pointed out that it was "distinguished by a Socialist tendency (in the negative sense as a movement directed against the appropriation of the soil) and as a movement of the lower orders."<sup>3</sup> In his wanderings abroad Stephens had come into contact with Socialist theories, he assimilated a little of them, and he rubbed his experiences of '48 and the current state of the national movement against what he had learned. He saw at least the fatal weakness of the Young Irelanders and the Irish Confederation: that they were middle-class orators and essayists, chatterers about revolution but no makers of it. He resolved to base the I.R.B. on the town workers, tenant farmers and rural labourers. A big stride forward—but the key positions of the Brotherhood were still reserved for middle-class "men of education." Stephens, himself a petty bourgeois, was chief; the other prominent men were Thomas Clarke Luby, a Trinity College man, John O'Leary, who possessed a snug little investment and who had a great contempt for what he

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<sup>3</sup> *Marx and Engels on Ireland*, London, 1933.



called "the ignorant and intractable Ribbonman," and Charles Kickham, a litterateur who also came from a comfortably-situated family. These men might be of high courage and sincerity—as they mostly were—but they were bound to be confused in their ideas and their programme was equally bound to lack clarity.

The I.R.B. recruited amain, Stephens touring the country and the others working in the towns. But even at its mightiest the Fenian movement betrayed its Achilles heel. Its leaders could not see the interconnection between the agrarian and national revolutions. In the West the Ribbon lodges went over wholesale to the I.R.B., but the Fenian leaders, instead of harnessing the peasants' local struggles against the landlords to the national revolution, marched them into the fields and mountains, drilled them and taught them that the battle against evictions, etc., only diverted them from the great cause of national freedom. The Fenians were theoretically against the appropriation of the soil by the landlords and land-grabbers, but, nevertheless, Michael Davitt has noted that :<sup>4</sup>

"The Irish landlords had experienced a decade of almost uninterrupted peace from agrarian troubles while Fenianism was educating the peasantry and working classes of Ireland in the principles of Wolfe Tone and Emmet and in the lessons of independence taught by the poetry of Thomas Davis. The movement had one

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Davitt: *The Fall of Feudalism*, New York, 1904.

negative virtue to them: it was not an agrarian association. This, perhaps, accounts for the fact that from the year 1858 to that of 1870 these same landlords succeeded in evicting close upon fifteen thousand families from home and holding."

The I.R.B. took its forces out of the day-to-day struggle, held back any general mass fight, and in so doing stunted its base. When the Fenian leaders judged in 1867 that they were ready, the Castle stretched out its claw and within a few hours they were all behind the jail gates. There was no developing mass movement, only a headless secret society, and all that could happen took place. There were gallant and scattered skirmishes in several parts of the country.

We are able now to see the failings no less than the virtues of the Brotherhood. As capitalism is to-day the basis of imperialist rule in Ireland, landlordism was the basis in the nineteenth century. Fintan Lalor's policy still held. It was useless "to keep up a feeble and ineffectual fire from a foolish distance upon the English government"; it was necessary "to wheel their batteries round and bend them on the *English garrison* of landlords." Had Stephens flung the whole weight of his Fenians into the battle against the landlords the transition from the mass agrarian struggle into the national revolution would have provided the Castle with more than a few isolated skirmishes to subdue. The revolutionists failed to see the importance of the agrarian movement, and it was left to the parliamentary reformists to realise its value to them if canalised with

sufficient skill. It was, however, in concession to "the intensity of Fenianism," Gladstone admitted, that the first atrophied Land Act of 1870 was passed and that the State Church was disestablished—at a price that guaranteed to the parsons their pluckings out of the Irish people.

In 1877 famine came again to Ireland. The landlords' policy of remorseless evictions had evoked a fierce land hunger on the part of the tenant farmers, who, haunted by the fear of being driven into the ranks of the landless urban workers, eagerly outbid each other for holdings, undertaking impossible rents. In addition the tenants were heavily in debt to the banks, manure agents and seedsmen—debts contracted under the spell of the good harvests of the early 'seventies. Not only was there a bad harvest in 1877; there was a marked falling off in agricultural prices, due to increased competition from Canada and the United States, countries with a superior agrarian technique, and where richly fertile land could be had for a bagatelle rent. The value of the Irish potato crop alone fell in 1877 from £12,464,000 to £5,271,000.

No rents were earned in 1877, of course, but the landlord was paid in full, mainly by borrowed money, while the crops for '78 were put in largely on credit. The crop of '78 failed too; a quotation from Michael Davitt will show the progress of the crisis :<sup>5</sup>

"According to official statistics issued by the Irish

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

registrar-general, the total value of Irish crops in 1876 was estimated to be worth £36,000,000; in 1877, £28,000,000; in 1878, £32,000,000; and in 1879, £22,000,000. The year 1876 was by no means a good year in the matter of prices, but taking it as an average, the actual loss by Irish farmers in the three following years, as compared with the produce of 1876, amounted to a total sum of £26,000,000, or over two and a half years' rental of all the agricultural land of Ireland."

Connacht felt the crisis hardest of all the provinces, for here more than anywhere else the potato was still practically the only food of the peasantry. So when, in A. M. Sullivan's words, "in the winter of 1878 the Irish farmers woke up to the terrible fact that on the hazard of yet another crop, that of 1879, their very existence hung" it was the West that lit the torch of revolt.

The leading spirit of the land war that now began was Michael Davitt. He was the son of a Mayo tenant farmer who in 1850—when Michael was four years old—was evicted by the "crowbar brigade" and driven to England. The father settled down in Haslingden, in Lancashire, and the younger Davitt, when a mere child, commenced work in a local factory. Here he suffered the loss of his right arm, the limb being caught in the machinery and having to be amputated. Later he earned his living in devious ways, and doubtless it was his proletarian experience and early bruising by capitalism that gave him the social breadth he was to display later.

In 1870, following the failure of the Fenian rising,

Davitt (who had been an I.R.B. man from youth) was arrested in London while attempting to secure arms and was sentenced to fifteen years' penal servitude. While in Dartmoor hell he pondered over the next stage of the national struggle and arrived at the policy afterwards known as the "New Departure." He saw that "what was wanted was to link the land or social question to that of Home Rule by making the ownership of the soil the basis of the fight for self-government."<sup>6</sup> After his release from prison on ticket-of-leave in December, 1877, he journeyed to America and gained the support of the revolutionary nationalist organisations for his policy. On his return to Ireland he won to his side prominent Fenians such as Thomas Brennan and Patrick Egan, but Parnell as yet stood aloof.

In April, 1879, the famous Irishtown meeting fired the first shot in the land war. "The county of Mayo had suffered more from the manifold evils of the landlord system than any other Irish county. It had lost more of its population, had experienced more evictions, had witnessed more 'clearances,' possessed a greater number of people on the border-line of starvation, and had more paupers in proportion to the population than any of its sister counties."<sup>7</sup> Conditions decreed that Mayo should be the scene of the first battle.

The fight opened at Quinaltagh, a townland near Irishtown. Early in 1879, the Parish Priest, Canon

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

Burke, came into possession of his brother's lands there, and immediately threatened his tenants with dispossession unless they paid the arrears of their monstrous rack-rents. Davitt, who was in the county, suggested a mass protest meeting, and a call went round to the tenant farmers of Mayo to mobilise at Irishtown. Fully seven thousand gathered at the meeting, five hundred mounted men acting as a body-guard for the speakers, among whom were J. O'Connor Power, the Home Rule member for the county, and Thomas Brennan.

Vigorous resolutions against landlordism were passed unanimously, and one speech, that of Thomas Brennan, went to the heart of the matter. The only effective way out, he declared, was the "tearing out, root and branch, of the class that caused the disease . . . you may get a Federal Parliament, perhaps Repeal of the Union—nay more, you may establish an Irish Republic, but as long as the tillers of the soil are forced to support a useless and indolent aristocracy, your Federal Parliament would be a bauble and your Irish Republic but a fraud."

The demonstration was an immense success. The rack-renting Canon within a few days granted a reduction of twenty-five per cent., and though, in Davitt's words, "many of the altars in Mayo rang with warnings and denunciations against gatherings called by 'irresponsible people' and which showed 'disrespect' towards the priests," the tenant farmers were not slow to learn the lesson of their mass power.

Two months later, on June 8, came the famous Westport meeting, where Charles Stewart Parnell came into

the movement and launched his famous slogan "Pay no rents and hold a firm grip on your homesteads." Parnell was a national bourgeois parliamentarian, simply and solely, and at first he had fought shy of the land agitation, but now seeing the great voting reserve that lay in the peasantry, and having no qualms about curbing the landlords so long as the land war did not lead to a revolutionary challenge to the whole tenets of private property rights, he flung himself into the struggle.

Soon, with the failure of the harvest of '79, the cry of "No rent" was heard from one end of Connacht to the other. The National Land League of Mayo was launched at a convention of peasant farmers held at Castlebar on August 16. Michael Davitt read the principles of the new organisation, affirming the ownership of "the land of Ireland by the people of Ireland," attacking the "idle non-producing class" of landlords, and urging "the farmers of Ireland to be up and doing at once and organise themselves." The League, in its fight against evictions, undertook "the organising of local clubs or defence associations in the baronies, towns and parishes of this county, the holding of public meetings and demonstrations on the land question and the printing of pamphlets on that and other subjects for the information of the farming classes."

Parnell took no part in organising this convention, but in September, when "the fears of a coming partial famine grew into the certainty of a deep and widespread distress as a result of crops destroyed by continuous

rains," he agreed to assist in transforming the Mayo League into the Irish National Land League.

The transformation took place on October 21, 1879, and now the organised war of the landlord and peasant classes became nation-wide. The objects of the League were declared to be: "first, to bring about a reduction of rack rents; second, to facilitate the ownership of the soil by the occupiers." A further resolution declared that "the objects of the League can best be attained by promoting organisation among the tenant farmers; by defending those who may be threatened with eviction for refusing to pay unjust rents; by facilitating the working of the Bright clauses of the Land Act during the winter; and by obtaining such a reform in the laws relating to land as will enable every tenant to become the owner of his holding by paying a fair rent for a limited number of years." And Parnell consenting very wryly, the use of the League funds in the electoral interests of a landlord or landlord's nominee was prohibited.

The landlords' alarm grew, and the State—"the executive committee of the ruling class" in the apt words of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848—was called into action. Dublin Castle prepared to strike. An eviction was to take place at Balla, in Mayo, on November 24, and the League planned mass resistance. On November 19 Davitt was arrested in Dublin, carried off to Sligo, and remanded there on a charge of sedition. Protest meetings were at once held, 10,000 men demonstrated at Balla, and the jury refused to convict Davitt and his



"accomplices." The Land League had won the first round.

The State attack had failed; landlordism took up another weapon. In Davitt's words, "it owned the law; it influenced the churches": and it decided to use the latter power in breaking the resistance of the impudent serfs. Dr. McHale, Archbishop of Tuam, had already thundered to no purpose against "night patrolling, acts and words of menace, with arms in hand—the profanation of what is most sacred in religion"—as "directly tending to impiety and disorder in Church and Society." Dr. McCabe, Archbishop of Dublin, now took up the cudgels on behalf of the ruling class. "The Archbishop was full of sympathy for the victims of distress, and strong in that complacent charity which can give an abundance of advice and blame to those who suffer wrong and the silence of sympathy and support towards the authority that upholds and the class which inflicts the suffering."<sup>8</sup> The *Osservatore Romano*, organ of the Vatican, joined in the clamour on behalf of landlordism, lying monstrously about the murder of priests in Ireland. But "facts are chieftains that winnading"; the famine, the cause of it and the need to fight both were there, and the Land League continued to grow.

With the turn of the year the fight grew fiercer. Parnell and John Dillon were touring America for financial aid, and showers of ejectment processes began to fall

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

around the countryside "like snowflakes," as Gladstone said. The League decided to give battle to the process-servers (eviction could not take place until a process had been served), and early in January the encounter at Carraroe, in one of the wildest parts of Connemara, gave them a great victory. Ringed by police bayonets, a process-server named Fenton attempted to deliver his hated documents. Men, women and children had mobilised from all the neighbouring parishes and, despite his escort, the women tore the processes from Fenton. There was a skirmish in which a number of women and boys received bayonet wounds, then with blackthorns and stones the men fell on the peelers.

The guardians of law and order broke and fled, reformed, then fired a volley over the heads of the people. To the surprise of the police the peasants only charged the more furiously, driving the enemy to his very barrack-door. Next day two thousand mountaineers as well as the men from the Joyce country arrived and they paraded in companies in front of the barracks, beseeching the "women beaters" to come forth. Landlordism could scarcely believe the astounding news that flashed over the telegraph wires that week-end.

In March came a General Election in Britain. A Liberal Government was returned, and in Ireland the Land League-Parnellite candidates swept the country. "Buckshot" Forster came to Ireland as Gladstone's Chief Secretary, a limping sort of a Land Bill ("it would have limited evictions only," said Davitt, "it would not have stopped them, as its operations were to be confined

to holdings under £30 and to certain scheduled districts") was proposed by the Irish Party, read by the House of Commons and thrown out by the House of Lords. The Land League began to prepare for a general strike against rent. Funds poured in from America. At Ballinamore, in Leitrim, an evicted tenant named Mahon was shot dead by his landlord and a jury refused to find a true bill against the murderer. "And now commenced the sure sign of coming state prosecutions or coercion. Irish judges going on circuit began their political harangues from the bench under cover of addresses to the members of the grand juries. This has been a notorious practice of these ermined partisans at all times of popular excitement."<sup>9</sup>

So the cry of "Hold the harvest" rang through the country, for the harvest proved an unusually good one; and at a meeting at Claremorris, County Mayo, on September 14, the idea of the boycott was made concrete by James Redpath.

Captain Boycott, who gave a name to the new and deadly weapon of the peasantry, was agent for Lord Erne, a Mayo landlord. The estate was not a ranch or divided into small holdings, but was largely a big capitalist farm worked by wage-labourers. A dispute arose in the summer months between Boycott and his labourers. He dismissed the workers, discovered that the Land League would permit no one to blackleg, so decided to hit back by evicting his

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

few tenant farmers. Processes were taken out, but no one dared serve them. The League took the offensive. Boycott's herdsmen left him, the local blacksmith refused to shoe his horses, the baker would not supply bread, and the harvest lay in the fields with no one to gather it in. From Ulster fifty scabs were brought—under the protection of 2,000 troops!—to save the crops. Black-legs and soldiers were boycotted by the neighbourhood, so Boycott found his "protectors," as is the pleasant little custom of the British Army, helping themselves to everything on which they could lay hands. It cost £3,500 to save Lord Erne's £300 worth of "praties"! Boycott was beaten; he bowed the knee and retired to England.

The landlords' cries for coercion now grew more vehement than ever, and in December Dublin Castle launched its State trials against the Land League leaders. The jury could not agree, the "traversers" were freed, and landlordism and British capitalism baffled for a while, prepared to strike an even heavier blow. On February 5, 1881, Michael Davitt was arrested. He was still a ticket-of-leave man, and without preferring any charge they sent him back to penal servitude. Gladstone then prepared to introduce two coercion bills. Parnell, in turn, for the first time seemed to recognise the importance of the British working class as an ally of Ireland's agrarian-national struggle. In a manifesto to the English and Irish people he pointed out that "Parliament is at present governed by landlords, manufacturers, and shopkeepers," and appealed for a "junction between English democracy and Irish nationalism."

But it was at this moment that the timorousness of the Irish middle class which had captured the leadership of the agrarian struggle showed itself. In February the No Rent Manifesto should have been issued. The peasant farmers were on tip-toe for the fight, they were organised solidly in the League, coercion had not yet bludgeoned the country and placed the local leaders in jail, and at Majuba Hill the insurgent Boers had just given the Red-coats a lesson in military strategy. But the Irish middle class, as in '48, held its hand, and the League was now at bay.

The peelers descended on the countryside, arrested many of the League's best fighting men, and—strange coincidence — Archbishop McCabe boomed another anathema against the desperate peasants. "On this occasion" in Davitt's scathing words "the existence of the Ladies' Land League had troubled his pastoral conscience. He was greatly alarmed about the 'modesty' of the women of Ireland. It was a tender concern awakened for the first time in this respect. The dens of Dublin, the conduct of British soldiers in the streets each night, outside his Grace's hall door, the tens of thousands of Irish girls who had been driven to shame and ruin in foreign cities in being evicted from Irish homes by the system the Land League had resolved to cripple or destroy, never once appealed to the moral indignation or political thoughts of this Castle Bishop."<sup>10</sup> Archbishop Croke's rebuke to McCabe is famous: equally

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

notorious is it that within a year the Castle cleric was made a Cardinal, while the aged Archbishop Croke was summoned to Rome to be humiliated publicly for his temerity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *THE MIDDLE CLASS BETRAYAL: KILMAINHAM*

THE coercion campaign of the ruling class brought in its train a wave of terrorism against land-grabbers. Early in April a bloody conflict took place near Ballaghadereen in Mayo. Process servers guarded by police found their path to the tenants' cabins barred by angry peasants who refused to give way. A volley of buckshot was poured into the crowd and two men fell dead. The infuriated people fell upon the police and stoned the sergeant to death, his minions fleeing for their lives. So, on April 8, Gladstone introduced the offset to coercion—the Bill now known as the Land Act of 1881.

“The Act purported to give all yearly agricultural tenants (1) the right to sell their tenancies for the best price that could be got; (2) the right to have a fair rent fixed by the Land Courts at intervals of fifteen years; (3) security of tenure inasmuch as that so long as the rent was paid and the conditions of the tenancy observed the tenant could not be evicted. No definition of the term ‘fair rent’ was given, but what was known as the Healy clause provided that ‘no rent shall be allowed or made payable in respect of improvements made by the tenant or his predecessors.’ There were numbers of exceptions of and limitations on these provisions, so that it was estimated that they would not apply to two-thirds at most of

the agricultural holdings in Ireland, estimated to be about 500,000."<sup>1</sup> In addition, tenants themselves had to prove that improvements were their own, and, as an instance of the exceptions, farmers whose holdings ran down to the seashore, and who, often at great risk, carried on kelp-making, were not entitled to any reduction. The whole Bill avoided a fundamental solution of the agrarian problem and was destined to prove, as John Dillon prophesied, nothing more than a milch cow for the lawyers and hordes of Land Court officials.

The Land League roundly criticised the imperfect nature of the Act, a statement issued by them declaring: "It is impossible to place the relations between landlord and tenant on any sound economic basis in Ireland. It is impossible to sustain it on any other basis than that of bayonets. With us landlordism means confiscation." But the middle-class leaders of the League were not disposed to try another tilt at the State. At a series of County Conventions Parnell recommended that a certain number of tenants from selected estates should apply to the Courts to have legal rents fixed, and in this way the defects of the Act would become manifest. But, of course, a breach having once been made in the tenants' front, rot set in. A section of Ulster farmers secured reductions of twenty-five per cent., and soon there was a rush to the courts.

In the meantime the struggle in the countryside was sharpening. Revolver-armed men prevented evictions in

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*



Limerick, cattle were rescued from the pound in Tipperary, a body of Mayo tenants resolved to pay no rent until the "suspects" were liberated, and all over the country process-servers were waylaid and beaten. The Land League was bidding defiance to coercion. Gladstone replied by ordering the arrest of Parnell. And now all Ireland was aflame. Five days after Parnell's interment in Kilmainham the central branch of the League met in Dublin to issue the famous "No Rent Manifesto," a document deserving quotation in full:—

"Fellow Countrymen! The hour to try your souls and to redeem your pledges has arrived. The Executive of the National Land League, forced to abandon the policy of testing the Land Act, feels bound to advise the tenant farmers of Ireland from this forth to pay no rents under any circumstances to their landlords until the Government relinquishes the existing system of terrorism and restores the constitutional rights of the people. Do not be daunted by the removal of your leaders. Your fathers abolished tithes by the same methods without any leaders at all and with scarcely a shadow of the magnificent organisation that covers Ireland to-day. Do not suffer yourselves to be intimidated by threats of military violence. It is as lawful to refuse to pay rents as it is to receive them. Against the passive resistance of an entire population military power has no weapons. Do not be wheedled into compromise of any sort by the dread of eviction. If you only act together in the spirit in which, during the last two years, you have countless times solemnly pledged your vows, they can no more evict a

whole nation than they can imprison them. The funds of the National Land League will be poured out unstintedly for the support of all who may endure eviction in the course of the struggle.

“Our exiled brothers in America may be relied on to contribute, if necessary, as many millions of money as they have contributed in thousands to starve out landlordism and bring English tyranny to its knees. You have only to show that you are not unworthy of their boundless sacrifices in your cause. No power on earth except faintheartedness on your own part can defeat you. Landlordism is already staggering under the blows which you have dealt it amid the applause of the world. One more crowning struggle for your land, your homes, your lives—a struggle in which you have all the memories of your race, all the hopes of your children, all the sacrifices of your imprisoned brothers, all your cravings for your rent-enfranchised land, for happy homes and national freedom to inspire you—one more effort to destroy landlordism at the very source and fount of its existence, and the system which was and is the curse of your race and of your existence will have disappeared for ever.

“The world is watching to see whether all your splendid hopes and noble courage will crumble away at the first threat of a cowardly tyranny. You have to choose between throwing yourselves on the mercy of England and taking your stand by the organisation which has once before proved too strong for English despotism; you have to choose between all-powerful unity and im-

potent disorganisation; between the land for the landlords and the land for the people. We cannot doubt your choice. Every tenant farmer of Ireland is to-day the standard-bearer of the flag unfurled at Irishtown and can bear it to a glorious victory. Stand together in the face of the brutal and cowardly enemies of your race. Pay no rents under any pretext. Stand passively, firmly, fearlessly by while the armies of England may be engaged in a hopeless struggle against a spirit which their weapons cannot touch. Act for yourselves if you are deprived of the counsels of those who have shown how to act. No power of legalised violence can extort one penny from your purses against your will. If you are evicted you shall not suffer; the landlord who evicts will be a ruined pauper, and the government which supports him with its bayonets will learn in a single winter how powerless is an armed force against the will of a united, determined and self-reliant nation.

“(Signed) Charles S. Parnell, President, Kilmainham Jail; A. J. Kettle, Hon. Sec., Kilmainham Jail; Michael Davitt, Hon. Sec., Portland Prison; Thomas Brennan, Hon. Sec., Kilmainham Jail; John Dillon, Head Organiser, Kilmainham Jail; Thomas Sexton, Organiser, Kilmainham Jail; Patrick Egan, Treasurer, Paris.

“October 18.”

Forster's reply was to proclaim the Land League an illegal organisation, and the Ladies' Land League took

up the fight. With the money coming from America evicted families were looked after, dependants of "suspects" in jail received a pound a week, organisers went through the counties to harden the strike front, and the boycott was applied more vigorously than ever. Davitt quotes a Dublin message published in the British press of June 7, 1881—that is, before the No Rent Manifesto was issued—which shows the state of the country: "The news from Ireland is disquieting. The condition of affairs is little short of actual civil war. In County Cork the excitement is great. The roads are torn up with pickaxes and made impassable, and the telegraph wires are cut in many directions. Ballydehob and Schull are inaccessible by the ordinary roads, which are broken up, and bridges are pulled down. Five hundred foot soldiers, twenty dragoons and seventy Service Corps men, with one gun, have been sent to the scene from the West."

The land war had brought Ireland to the edge of revolution. Had the war gone on it could have trod but one path—the trampling underfoot of the whole system of landlordism, and the transition to the national fight to free Ireland from the dominance of Britain. But this the middle-class Parnellite leadership had never contemplated; and that leadership now shrank back in horror from the forces it had unloosed. Once again the Irish masses were to be betrayed by the upper class. Parnell opened negotiations with the British Government, a settlement was reached, and on May 2, 1882, the Land League chief was released. The Government agreed to

legislate against evictions for arrears and to introduce certain other measures (there was vague talk even of some kind of Home Rule), while Parnell was to stop "outrages and intimidations of all kinds," and, in addition, to "co-operate cordially with the Liberal Party in forwarding Liberal principles." "Buckshot" Forster was to resign to make the bargain more palatable to the Irish masses.

But that it was a bargain, and, on the Irish side, a defeat and a drawing back, was clear to all but the Constitutionalists. "It was the vital turning point in Mr. Parnell's career," says Davitt, "and he unfortunately turned in the wrong direction. He had hitherto been in everything but name a revolutionary reformer and had won many triumphs at the head of the most powerful organisation any Irish leader had at his back for a century. He now resolved to surrender the Land League and to enter the new stage of his political fortunes as an opportunist statesman."<sup>2</sup> The assassination of Burke and Cavendish four days after Parnell's release hardened the resolve of the middle-class politicians to abandon revolutionary activity for ever; the Irish bourgeoisie had burnt its fingers badly. The Land League was never revived, but, "not in an aggressive way" Parnell and his associates decided to form another organisation which outwardly would be the successor of the League, but in reality would become the machine to mobilise the Irish peasant farmers for electoral support of the national

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<sup>2</sup> Davitt: *Ibid.*

reformists. At a conference in Dublin, on October 17, 1882, the Irish National League was founded. Its policy was declared to be: "to attain for the Irish people the following objects: (1) National self-government; (2) land law reform; (3) local self-government; (4) extension of the parliamentary and municipal franchises; (5) the development and encouragement of the labour and industrial interests of Ireland."

But, despite the attempts of the Irish bourgeois politicians, the agrarian struggle could not yet be steered into constitutional channels. Evictions continued apace, Tynan estimating that from 1878 to 1886 130,000 people were turned out of their holdings.<sup>3</sup> Meetings were proclaimed. Earl Spencer and his Chief Secretary, George Trevelyan, resorted once more to jury packing. In the West and South the accursed potato was again showing signs of failing. My Lord Rack-Rent was still supreme in many parts of the country, while the Act of 1881 did nothing whatever for the 300,000 agricultural labourers. Passions were smouldering in the countryside all through the two years after the passing of the Act; when, in 1883, Spencer revived an Act of Edward III.—an Act passed in 1361 legalising trial without jury—there was a blaze of revolt.

The revolt came to a head in 1886. The Gladstone Government in Britain, which had aimed not only at a more radical settlement of the land question, but at

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<sup>3</sup> P. J. P. Tynan: *The Irish National Invincibles*. London, 1894.

granting a measure of Home Rule in local affairs, with all essential questions reserved for imperial control, was defeated. The Conservative Salisbury Government was returned, and Balfour commenced a new era of coercion in Ireland.

Coercion, together with a further fall in agricultural prices, and a consequent inability of the farmers to pay rents (between 1884 and September, 1886, no fewer than 8,000 tenants were deprived of their statutory right to their holdings, and those not evicted remained on the land only as tenants-at-will) produced the famous "Plan of Campaign," drawn up by Harrington. Parnell was not consulted; when he learned of the counter-attack he did his best to prevent it: "he made up his mind not to enter again into any phase of a land war that might by any possible chance reproduce similar events to those of 1881-2."<sup>4</sup>

The "Plan of Campaign" was as follows: a number of important estates were chosen, committees were elected on them, and into the hands of the committees were given the reduced rents that the tenants could afford to pay. The reduced rents were then offered in bulk to the landlord, and if he refused to accept them he was paid nothing at all. Sixty landlords at once bowed the knee, twenty-four others after a brief struggle accepted reductions averaging twenty-five per cent., but seventeen headed by Lord Clanricarde held out, and instead of agreements there were evictions. The

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<sup>4</sup> Davitt: *Ibid.*

National League in its turn rendered immediate aid to its "wounded soldiers"; between 1886 and 1893 over £230,000 was paid to maintain evicted families.

The landlords and their State machine gave no quarter in the struggle. Police reinforcements were rushed to the disturbed areas; jailings were a daily occurrence. It was the knowledge that they were operating the official Castle policy that enabled the peelers to commit such outrages as the Mitchelstown massacre in September, 1887. Several thousand tenant farmers from Cork, Waterford and Tipperary flocked into the town for a mass meeting to be addressed by John Dillon and other leaders of the "Plan." As the meeting was in progress, a body of constabulary escorting a Government reporter marched into the crowd. The farmers pushed them back and soon blackthorns and batons were clashing in battle. The peelers gave way, and pursued by a shower of stones ran for the barracks. From the windows of this shelter they poured the contents of their rifles on the throng; an old man named Casey was killed outright, and two others, Shinnock and Lonergan, one a mere boy, died later. And though a Coroner's jury found a verdict of wilful murder against the police chief who ordered the shooting, no one was ever brought to trial for the slaughter. The indignation of the people swelled when, a few days later, the *United Irishman* published a copy of a telegram from the Castle to a magistrate: "Don't hesitate to shoot."

In other parts of the country there were similar outrages. A boy was shot dead by a drunken policeman in



the town of Tipperary, the Coroner's jury decreed "wilful murder," and the Crown refused to prosecute. At Timoleague the peelers fired on a meeting and a tenant was killed; a packed jury disagreed, and the prosecution failed. The Castle's uniformed thugs batoned a man to death at Fermoy—again a verdict of "wilful murder" by a Coroner's jury, and at the trial the murderers "left the Court without a stain on their characters." In County Mayo, Ellen Conroy was sent to jail for a week for riotous conduct. Her age was twelve years.

But the spirit of the Irish countryfolk could not be bludgeoned into submission. Hundreds of their most active fighters were jailed; their comrades welcomed them back to their ranks with brass bands and turf bonfires. And the mythical "Captain Moonlight" and his merry men intensified their activity. Upon a road-wall or nailed to a tree-trunk at the cross-roads of the troubled districts would appear "proclamations," often rendered more pertinent by the addition of rude drawings of a gun and skull, warning agents, bailiffs and peelers. If the warning was not taken the bold Captain sallied out at night to make good his threat. The middle class that was trying to turn the attention of the countryfolk from the blunderbuss to the ballot-box naturally waxed indignant over the operations of the Moonlighters. There were many such National League meetings as that held on May 31, 1886, at Taghmon, County Wexford—with a priest presiding, of course—where the secretary complained of the "nasty moonlighting notices" posted up in the parish, and where the following resolution was

adopted: "That we condemn in the strongest manner the conduct of those who posted up anonymous placards in our district; that we consider only those who are enemies to the national cause and who are in the interests of landlordism would be guilty of such folly."

But if shopkeeper respectability hated the Moonlighters, the people realised that here were fighters of their own class. The banned songs that were sung by the countryfolk for many a year after the Plan had gone are full of the deeds of Captain Moonlight:

*The Captain of our gallant band is scarcely aged  
eighteen—*

*Altho' he's young, his heart is true; he dearly loves  
the Green.*

*And tell it to old Erin's foes, we are unconquered  
still*

*As nightly we assemble with our Captain for to drill.*

Another piece of racy doggerel was very popular in Kerry. The first verse runs:

*Rally round from sea to sea,  
Raise your voice and chorus me,  
We'll sing the song of liberty  
And Captain Moonlight's Army!*

The war dragged on and it was not coercion that ended it, but the realisation by the peasantry that their middle-class leaders had abandoned the struggle for the less dangerous war of parliamentary words. So the tenants began to flock to the land courts, and the suc-

ceeding Land Acts accelerated the rush. The Land League phase of the agrarian struggle was over.

Many of the lessons of the fight will already be obvious. In the 'sixties Karl Marx analysed the Irish requirements as follows: independence from England, an agrarian revolution, and protection for Irish industries. The land war brought Ireland to the verge of both agrarian and political revolution. That it did not take its full, logical course was due to the leadership. The peasantry wanted two of these, but as a class could not lead the struggle. The young proletariat wanted all three, and was the only class that could have led the fight to victory, but it was too weak and not sufficiently immune from the idea-mongers of the middle class. And the bourgeoisie itself—which, through its representatives, Parnell and company, captured the hegemony of the struggle—desired only a half-hearted, mealy-mouthed agrarian reform, and was too cowardly to fight for anything more. Parnell, for instance, realised that at the period nationalisation of the land was the only solution (a truly bourgeois democratic solution) of Ireland's agrarian trouble, yet "he declared for a peasant proprietary in preference to the broader national settlement, but probably did this as an opportunist policy in face of the fact that the farmers and the priests were more favourable to the less radical plan of settlement."<sup>5</sup>

The manufacturers and traders quite openly placed their class limitations on the struggle. In 1884, for

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<sup>5</sup> Davitt: *Ibid.*

instance, Parnell "created all clergymen *ex-officio* delegates to all conventions which should meet for the selection of Parliamentary candidates. This action was prompted by a desire to have a strong conservative nationalist influence on his side against any possible radical opposition. Mr. Parnell had no political love for clerical politicians. . . . But he knew they stood as a whole for moderate nationalism like his own, and as some 200,000 labourers and artisans were about to be added by the Franchise Bill to the electoral forces of Ireland, he wisely for his own present purposes, but unwisely for his future political fortunes, dispensed with the form of election in the case of all clergymen. . . ."

"You know," Parnell told Davitt on one occasion, "The clergy are very useful against extremists like yourself when we are away in London."

The Kilmainham surrender, as has already been pointed out, showed where the Irish middle class stood. With the bourgeois leaders in jail and unable to throttle the struggle, Parnell and his associates saw the danger of the position. "Extreme men, not necessarily belonging to the Fenian body, had become, in a sense, masters of the situation outside by the imprisonment of all moral-force local leaders. They struck at the law, which had a doubly obnoxious character to them in being alien and coercive, while the state of things that prevailed encouraged them to plot and plan measures which Mr. Parnell, as a non-revolutionist, had probably never contemplated, even as justifiable in a strike against rent. The general state of the country under these circum-

stances seems to have greatly alarmed him as leading to the likelihood of precipitating a condition of general anarchy in which the League movement would be used not for the purposes he approved of, but for a real revolutionary end and aim.”<sup>6</sup>

Connolly’s characterisation of the struggle is one of his most brilliant pieces of writing. I give some extracts :

“In a rather amusing book published in France in 1887, under the title of *Chez Paddy*, Englished as *Paddy at Home*, the author, a French aristocrat, Baron E. de Mandat-Grancey, giving an account of a tour in Ireland in 1886, in the course of which he made the acquaintance of many of the Land League leaders, as well as visited at the mansions of a number of landlords, makes this comment :

“ ‘For in fact, however they may try to dissimulate it, the Irish claims, if they do not yet amount to Communism as their avowed object—and they may still retain a few illusions upon that point—still it is quite certain that the methods employed by the Land League would not be disowned by the most advanced Communists.’

“It was a recognition of this fact which induced the *Irish World*, the chief advocate of the Land League in America, to carry the sub-title of *American Industrial Liberator* and to be the mouthpiece of the nascent labour movement of those days, as it was also a recognition of this fact which prompted the middle-class leaders to abandon the land fight, and to lend their energies to an

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<sup>6</sup> Davitt: *Ibid.*

attempt to focus the whole interest of Ireland upon a parliamentary struggle as soon as ever a temporary setback gave them an opportunity to counsel a change of tactics.

“They feared to call into existence a spirit of inquiry into the rights of property which would not halt at a negation of the sacredness of fortunes founded upon rent, but might also challenge the rightfulness of fortunes drawn from profit and interest. They instinctively realised that such an inquiry would reveal that there was no fundamental difference between such fortunes; that they were made, not from land in the one case nor workshops in the other, but from the social subjection of the non-possessing class, compelled to toil as tenants on the land or as employees in the workshop or factory.

“For the same reason the Land League (which was founded in 1879 at Irishtown, Co. Mayo, at a meeting held to denounce the exactions of a certain priest in his capacity as a rackrenting landlord) had had at the outset to make headway in Ireland against the opposition of all the official Home Rule press, and in Great Britain amongst the Irish exiles to depend entirely upon the championship of poor labourers and English and Scottish Socialists. In fact these latter were for years the principal exponents and interpreters of the Land League principles to the British masses, and they performed their task unflinchingly at a time when the ‘respectable’ moneyed men of the Irish communities in Great Britain cowered in dread of the displeasure of their wealthy British neighbours. . . .

"The partial success of the Land League has effected a change in Ireland, the portent of which but few realise. Stated briefly, it means that the recent Land Acts, acting contemporaneously with the development of trans-Atlantic traffic, are converting Ireland from a country governed according to the conception of feudalism into a country shaping itself after capitalistic laws of trade. To-day the competition of the trust-owned farms of the United States and the Argentine Republic is a more deadly enemy to the Irish agriculturist than the lingering remnants of landlordism or the bureaucratic officialism of the British Empire.

"Capitalism is now the enemy, it reaches across the ocean; and after the Irish agriculturist has gathered his harvest and brought it to market he finds that a competitor living three thousand miles away under a friendly flag has undersold and beggared him. The merely political heresy under which middle-class *doctrinaires* have for nearly two hundred and fifty years cloaked the Irish fight for freedom has thus run its course. The fight made by the Irish septs against the English Pale and all it stood for; the struggle of the peasants and labourers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the great social struggle of all the ages will again arise and reshape itself in Ireland to suit the new conditions.

"That war which the Land League fought, and then abandoned, before it was either lost or won, will be taken up by the Irish toilers on a broader field with sharper weapons and a more comprehensive knowledge of all the essentials of a permanent victory. As the Irish

septs of the past were accounted Irish or English according as they accepted or rejected the native or foreign social order, as they measured their oppression or freedom by the loss or recovery of the collective ownership of their lands, so the Irish toilers from henceforward will base their fight for freedom not upon the winning or losing of the right to talk in an Irish Parliament, but upon their progress towards the mastery of those factories, workshops and farms upon which a people's bread and liberties depend."



## CHAPTER FIVE

### *BONDLORDISM REPLACES LANDLORDISM*

**G**LADSTONE'S Act of 1881 was destined to be one of a long series, all with the same motive. With the Land War of 1879-87, the class revolt of the Irish peasantry against their landlord-capitalist exploiters, often of foreign origin, had reached such dimensions that the whole fabric of rackrent had been undermined. Despite their hordes of bailiffs, police and English soldiery, despite their coercion terror, the landlords could no longer collect their rent-rolls in the good old way. So the more farseeing of them saw that their best course was to get rid of their ownership for as large a sum as possible, thereby obtaining liquid assets for investment in more secure undertakings. Thus the British Government's various Acts had a dual purpose: first, to relieve the landlords; second, by the creation of a peasant proprietorship to raise a barrier against the political revolution which the land war threatened. So the bondlord replaced the landlord; the exploitation of the tenant farmer through the payment of rent was transferred to the bondholding section of the capitalist class; and soon the boon to the landlord became the burden of the farmer.

The Act of 1881 has been dealt with already. There followed the Ashbourne Acts of 1885-88, under which £10,000,000 was advanced for land purchase, 250,000

holdings being bought. The annuity was four per cent. for a period of forty-nine years. The Balfour Acts of 1891-96 advanced £13,146,892 and provided for 46,834 holdings. With this Act and all subsequent purchase measures a step was taken, the effects of which are pressing heavily on the countryside to-day. Not only the personal liability of the purchaser and the security of the land itself were claimed as security, but the rates of the county in which the land was situated, in addition. Under the Balfour Acts also, the landlords were not paid in cash but in Land Stock, given to them at a discount and on such advantageous terms that they found the stock much more preferable. The last Act of the Balfour series, that of 1896, devised another shift in the landlord interest; the time of repayment was extended from forty-nine years to about seventy, and by lessening the annual payments (which were to be reduced every ten years) the landlords were able to get an even more inflated price for their estates.

Meanwhile, the agrarian struggle, though it had flickered down, had been by no means quenched by the succession of parliamentary measures. Huge estates were still untouched and thousands of country people were yet landless or occupying uneconomic holdings. But the grip of the Irish middle-class politicians on what political organisations were formed after the Parnell split was more sure than ever. The National Federation was launched in 1891, John Dillon becoming its leader, and the United Irish League, which in 1900 swallowed up the National Federation, was organised by William

O'Brien in 1898; but the goal of these was the Home Rule of the Irish bourgeoisie, and there arose no political economic movement such as the Land League in its hey-day.

Rural discontent increased with the closing years of the century, and in 1901 Dublin Castle put into operation the Coercion Act of 1887, seventeen counties being proclaimed. As always in Irish history, coercion acted but as a recruiting agent for the United Irish League.

One of the most vital parts in the struggle that now developed was played by the tenants on a few small estates in County Roscommon. The parliamentary panaceas had done nothing to lower the high rents they paid for their typical Connacht holdings—meagre, harsh, and grudging; and they decided upon action. Banding themselves together, they elected a leading committee and called a no-rent strike until the landlords agreed to accept less of what was actually their distilled sweat and blood. The United Irish League neither rendered help in the fight nor looked kindly upon it; it was too reminiscent of the dangerous years of the Land League. The tenants were left to their own resources, and that this local struggle was defeated was due to reasons which contain lessons even yet. "It was not a successful fight," says Davitt.<sup>1</sup> "The owners were Catholics. This circumstance appeared to cover a number of landlord sins in the minds of some discriminating Catholic dignitaries whose political charity would scarcely extend to the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Davitt: *Ibid.*

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same lengths in the case of heavy rents going into Protestant landlord pockets. The landlords secured the moral support of a local bishop and beat the combination. The fight was, in a sense, a failure, but it was like unto some defeats in a right cause—the victory gained by the landlords and their clerical allies was of a Pyrrhic nature.”

With this recrudescence of the war for the land, the Government took the obvious counter-measure. It planned yet another Land Act. Wyndham's 1902 Bill—framed, like all its predecessors, to give the landlords the maximum amount for their estates—was, however, rejected by the Irish Home Rulers; and for a time the United Irish League flirted with the idea of a rent strike, with a vigorous picketing of landlords and grabbers—a line of action borrowed from the trade union movement of the industrial workers.

The spokesmen of the propertied, however, soon drew back from such a policy of the propertyless when a boycotted merchant, financed by the landlords, claimed civil damages against the local branch of the League, and was awarded £7,000. Negotiations were opened between the League leaders, the landlords and the Castle, and the stage having been set by a number of letters in the press, a number of landlords, headed by Lord Dunraven, met those worthy “representatives” of the tenants, John Redmond, William O'Brien, T. W. Russell and Lord Mayor Harrington of Dublin. The meeting took place in December, 1902, the Government at this stage astutely leaving the field clear, declaring

that the land question lay with Irishmen, to be settled by friendly discussion. It was right. When on January 3, 1903, the terms of the settlement reached were announced, it was seen that once again the Irish middle class had betrayed the agrarian toilers—the agreed terms gave the landlords a better bargain even than Wyndham's Bill of the previous year. The surrender, however, as Michael Davitt called it, became the basis of the Land Act of 1903, and by their skilful propaganda in the press and on the platform the middle class were able to damp down any opposition and to have its terms accepted.

This new Land Act instituted a novel purchase system. Not the value of the landlords' estates but the guaranteeing of their income was taken as a guide in fixing the purchase price of holdings, the price being based upon a scaled reduction in the purchase annuity as compared with the previous rent. Obviously, the bigger a rack-renter the landlord had been the bigger the sum he now received. Prices rose from an average of less than eighteen years' purchase to between twenty-five and seventy-five years' purchase. The immediate effect of the Act was to inflate the value of the landlord's property over thirty per cent.

Small wonder that the landlord press hailed it with glee. A land purchase fund to the amount of £100,000,000 was created under the Act to facilitate purchase. This sum included £12,000,000 which was given to the landlords as a bonus in addition to the purchase price in order to induce them to sell; and as the bonus

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was paid at the rate of twelve per cent. on the purchase money, the rackrenter who obtained the highest price received also the lion's share of the bonus. Birrell's Amending Act of 1910 corrected this last scandal to some extent by making the bonus smaller when the purchase price was large, and vice versa; but it added another £6,000,000 to the bonus fund as well, while its other provisions were designed to check the rapidity of land purchase rather than to give it impetus.

It is important to note also that many tenants in Northern Ireland who bought out under the Wyndham Act were not only fleeced by the inflated purchase price, but are being robbed nakedly at the present time. Many farms of from thirty to forty acres were purchased in Ulster for between £400 and £500. The payment of the money was extended over a period of sixty-eight years, but although the tenants bought immediately after the passing of the Act, and have paid their annuities ever since, they are credited with their instalments only from the time the landlord received his final payment from the Government. In many cases this was in 1919, and the farmers, therefore, although they have been paying for nearly thirty years, are in 1933 credited with only fourteen instalments.

At the outbreak of the war, the whole amount advanced for land purchase under the Wyndham and Birrell Acts totalled £100,208,684, covering 308,333 holdings. But although these various measures had to some degree stemmed the devastation of the countryside, in

1914 it could be said that the whole basis of Ireland's agrarian economy had altered from the famine days; crops had given place to the bullock. Some figures comparing 1849 with 1914 will illustrate this radical change.

#### AREA UNDER VARIOUS CROPS, 1849 AND 1914

		Acres	Acres
Wheat	...	697,646	36,913
Oats	... ..	2,061,185	1,028,645
Barley	...	290,690	179,824
Potatoes	...	718,608	583,069
Turnips	...	360,069	276,872
Hay	... ..	1,141,371	2,487,513*

\* In 1914 the figures given are for "meadow and clover."

Bread corn, it will be seen, had almost vanished, while every other crop shows a decline. The exception, hay, is of course but a further proof of the transformation; its purpose was to provide fodder for animals. The figures for live stock complete the picture.

#### LIVE STOCK IN IRELAND, 1849 AND 1914

Horses	...	525,924	619,028
Cattle	...	2,771,139	5,051,645
Sheep	...	1,771,111	3,600,581
Pigs	... ..	795,463	1,305,638
Poultry	...	6,328,001	26,918,749

It was estimated that the annual value of the cattle trade at pre-war prices was about £13,000,000 or roughly

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one-fifth of the value of Irish exports. "Rural Ireland had become a vast cattle ranch."<sup>2</sup>

With the scarcity of food caused by the Great War, the acreage under tillage in Ireland increased with a bound. The British imperialists hesitated not to infringe on the "rights" of private property when the robber Empire was at stake, and early in 1917 an order was issued directing all occupiers of land, whose tillage fell below a certain proportion, to increase their cultivation by an amount equal to one-tenth of the total area of the holdings; all recalcitrant persons were to have their farms confiscated and cultivated by the Department of Agriculture. The ranchers whined, of course, but in this crisis for the imperialists it was "but me no buts" about State interference with private property rights; and later the minimum percentage of tillage was increased to three-twentieths.

Under the influence of these orders the acreage under food crops rose considerably. In 1917 about 124,000 acres were sown with wheat, three and a half times the area in 1914; potatoes increased to 709,000 acres, an improvement of about a quarter; and oats increased to 1,463,000 acres, an expansion of about 40 per cent. And this increase in tillage did not affect live stock; more cattle were raised than ever. The big and middle farmers made huge profits as a result, and increasingly felt their interests to be bound up with the Empire's fortunes; the smaller farmers had glimmerings of an illusory pros-

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Chart: *Economic History of Ireland*, Dublin, 1924.



perity that they were to suffer for in later years; and the increasing wealth of the big farmers served in the countryside to bring home both to the owners of uneconomic holdings and landless men the hardship of their situation.

With the suppression of the 1916 Rising, there was a new wage of agrarian struggle alongside the increasing national militancy. The land question again became the central feature of the national revolutionary struggle, and with the setting up of Dail Eireann and the declaration of the Republic there was an almost complete cessation in the payment of annuities to the British Exchequer. But although Sinn Fein supported this blow at the imperialist bloodsuckers, it set its face against any wholesale confiscation of the ranches, and land-hungry men who attempted to seize a number of big estates soon discovered the class character of the Republican State machine. For years the propagandists of Sinn Fein had preached the historical truth that all English property in Irish land was conceived in robbery and fraud; they had talked of the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of the land of Ireland: but so conveniently vague is the term "people"—Ireland's dispossessed were obviously not "the people." In the words of a pamphlet issued in 1921 by the Ministry of Home Affairs for the Republic:<sup>3</sup>

"While the I.R.A. were establishing their authority as a national police, a grave danger threatened the

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<sup>3</sup> *Constructive Work of Dail Eireann*, No. 1.

foundation of the republic. This was the recrudescence in an acute form of an agrarian agitation for the breaking up of the great grazing ranches into tillage holdings for landless men and 'uneconomic' small holders. . . . Emigration had been dammed up for five years while an immense rise in the value of land and farm products threw into more vivid relief than ever before the high profits of the ranchers and the hopeless outlook of the landless men and uneconomic holders. The latter, during the winter of 1919-20, began to take the matter into their own hands. Gradually a spirit of violence, inherited from centuries of agrarian serfdom in which violence had been the only resource, crept in. . . . All this was a grave menace to the Republic. The mind of the people was being diverted from the struggle for freedom by a class war. . . . There was a moment when it seemed that nothing could prevent wholesale expropriation. But this crisis was surmounted, thanks to a patriotic public opinion, and the civic sense of justice expressed through the Arbitration Courts and enforced by the Republican police."

A further pamphlet tells how "terrified landowners flocked up to Dublin to beseech protection from the Dail." That the planters' trust in the middle-class leaders of Sinn Feinn was justified is shown by the details given by this pamphlet of the first case that came before a special Republican Land Court. A number of small holders claimed land on a farm of about one hundred acres, owned jointly by two large farmers. The Court decided in favour of the men of property, but the

disillusioned working farmers defied the order of the court and remained in possession of the disputed land.

“ One night, about a fortnight after the issue of the judgment, the Captain of the local company of the I.R.A. descended upon them with a squad of his men—sons of very poor farmers like themselves—arrested four of them and brought them off to that very effective Republican prison—an unknown destination.”<sup>4</sup>

And the Irish Republic boasted of this “ constructive work ”! The Irish capitalists at the head of Sinn Fein were justified in taking pride in such work; they knew the thing that was being constructed—the jerrymandered capitalist Free State that was revealed when the Treaty scaffolding was taken away. But for the poor farmers it was a grim lesson in the kind of freedom desired by the native bourgeoisie.

The backbone of the resistance to the Treaty was the poor farmers—their land hunger unsatisfied—and the industrial workers, who found their standard of life considerably worsened after 1921. But the petty bourgeoisie, who led the Republic’s legion of the rearguard, were incapable of enunciating the only social policy that could have defeated the Treatyites. Liam Mellows, in his prison cell, alone saw what was necessary, and him the Irish capitalist allies of British imperialism dubbed a Communist and murdered in Arbour Hill. Mellows saw. He was too dangerous to live. . . .

After the consolidation of the Free State, the Land

<sup>4</sup> *Constructive Work of Dail Eireann*, No. 2.

Commission was transferred to its jurisdiction. Yet another Land Act came in 1923. Its purpose was threefold: first, to complete land purchase; second, to relieve congested areas; and last, and most important, to extract from Irish farmers the annuity tribute that Britain could no longer collect on behalf of the bondholders. As the report of the Land Commission for 1929 stated: "In the case of the Land Act, 1923, the preparatory work was unusually heavy, as it included the task of arranging for the compounded arrears of rents and payments in lieu of rents in respect of all tenanted land in the Saorstat Eireann coming under the provisions of the Act." In addition the ranchers were confirmed in their ownership of big unbroken estates. A similar measure was passed by the Six-County Government in 1925.

The end of the Civil War in 1923 saw the emigrant ship again plying its ghoulish hire as it had done before the pillarboxes were painted green. There were 19,077 emigrants from the Saorstat in 1924, and when it became obvious that for a time at any rate there could be no resistance to the Treaty, the number increased as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1925 ...	30,180	1928 ...	24,691
1926 ...	30,041	1929 ...	20,802
1927 ...	27,148	1930 ...	15,966

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<sup>5</sup> By 1932 emigration from Ireland had practically ceased. The United States prohibited immigration, and conditions there caused for the first time a reversal—many Irish workers fled the breadlines of America and returned.

The increase in emigration failed, however, to drain off the growing unrest in the countryside. The pressure of the Land Commission on the working farmers became greater, and decrees for annuity arrears grew more frequent at the industrial courts. In the columns of *An Phoblacht* the murmurings of the country people against the annuities began to be heard; Peadar O'Donnell, the then editor of *An Phoblacht*, spread the agitation, basing it not only on the growing inability of the small farmer to pay, but on the tribute character of the annuities, which were collected by the Free State Government and handed over to their British *confreres* for distribution to the British and Irish bondholders who had advanced the capital for the various purchase schemes.

Until 1927 there was no widespread resistance to the payment of annuities or rent, but in the early part of this year, Tirconail again struck a blow at the "robber rights." The campaign for the non-payment of rent drew in townland after townland in the Rosses, committees were elected, and on February 19 the struggle reached its height with the arrest of Sean McCool, Alick Mailey, Bernard O'Donnell and James McGee, charged with participating in an armed raid on the offices of the agent of the Marquis of Conningham's estate and taking rentals therefrom. The following week-end Peadar O'Donnell spoke at mass meetings at Meenmore and Doochary. He described how the rents and documents had been seized from the estate. "These blood-bespattered documents," he said, "are locked up in a faraway town under shelter of a police barrack. And

they disappear. The robbers' lists of claims disappear. You will remember the laugh that swept through the Rosses. Rory of the Hill could still stretch out his arm and help the people." Organisation was now the pressing need, he said. "There are keen-eared little foxy creatures listening to hear me say straight out to you: 'Don't pay annuities; don't pay rent.' It annoys them that speakers always say: 'Don't starve yourselves to pay annuities; don't starve yourselves to pay rent.' I say that again to-day. Our organisation in Tirconail is on that basis. When the organisation spreads to include other factors we will deal with the new situation."

On March 23 Peadar O'Donnell was arrested. On April 2 he was returned for trial on a charge of "having solicited and incited divers persons to conspire with him and with each other to refuse to pay annuities to the Land Commission." Stating that landlordism was never binding and that land annuities were no more binding than their source—the Conquest—the defendant said:

"I would feel myself justified in stating these principles at any time or in any part of Ireland; would feel justified in a prosperous Ireland, but in the Ireland of to-day where the peasant farmers are in the most desperate straits I felt I had the duty to say these things. To go a little further, I told the people that they themselves had the first right to live off the produce of their labour and that where rents could only be paid by starving the children they should not be paid. In the Rosses in Tirconail rents were paid by money sent home by chil-

dren who were forced to emigrate. Take the case of the O'Sullivan family in Cork this week, where father, mother and two children died of starvation. Should the payment of annuities be allowed to cause death by starvation of children? I have asked each townland so to organise that when the bailiff loots the byre, milk supplies to that home will continue. I have asked them not to buy seized cattle or to help in shipping them." On April 13, Peadar O'Donnell was tried and found not guilty.

Meanwhile, in Tirconail the fight proceeded, but it failed to strike deep roots and the men who were holding out found themselves isolated. Bailiff raids were prevented in many cases and there are farmsteads where the story is still told of an unfortunate cow that was "on the run" for weeks from the bailiff, seeing many faces and scenes before she returned to her owner. But several farmers were arrested for non-payment, and MacGee turned State evidence against the men who had raided the planter's agent. While awaiting trial these defendants went on hunger strike. On June 24, 1927, the men charged with the raid (and also with being members of a military organisation not established by law) appeared in the Central Court in Dublin and were sentenced to six months' imprisonment. They had already spent five months in jail, in addition. The speech of the prosecuting Counsel contained a gem of grim unconscious humour that revealed the pro-imperialist minds of native capitalism and its State apparatus. He spoke of "the Marquis of Conyngham,

long and honourably connected with the district when the families of the accused were not yet heard of." And the men in the dock whose families were unknown when the planter Conyngham stock descended upon Tirconail were O'Donnell, O'Malley and McCool!

The struggle was practically at an end now, however. It was impossible for a patch of Tirconail to win unaided when the fight could not be made a national issue, and the working farmers were compelled to seek terms.

By the beginning of 1930 a new base was being formed for organisation in the rural areas, for it was becoming evident to many small farmers that Ireland had been drawn into the world crisis, and that instead of "turning the corner" out of bad times the country was entering a period of prolonged and more severe bad times. In the West, conditions were particularly bad. In Galway, under the 1923 Act, the Free State Government had bought out a number of tenants at ridiculous prices, and the tenant purchasers were saddled with crushing annuities. In addition they were burdened with rates and the interest on money borrowed to stock their farms. Many of the holdings were becoming derelict; cattle were seized by bailiffs; and the city pound was broken into by angry farmers and the seized cattle rescued, and, despite a police hue and cry, disposed of safely. Even a Catholic priest, Fr. Fahy, was charged with having assaulted one of a bailiff gang raiding a poor widow, and was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment, which he served in Galway Jail. In West Donegal the struggle was taking place largely around the arrears issue; heavy



arrears had accumulated in 1918, when the people refused to pay annuities to the British administration. There were many seizures, but cattle seized by the Government could not be sold because of popular resistance. "Seized cattle are guarded until they can be stolen off by long night marches, to be passed into the hands of some crook organisation. There are instances where nothing went to the credit of the decree by seizures, and a bailiff who took the only cow from a byre credited the tenant with one shilling and sixpence against the rent bill. A pony and cart and brand-new harness, three head of cattle, did not satisfy a rent arrear of six pounds."<sup>6</sup>

Rent arrears were the big issue in the glens of Clare also, while in Tipperary the pressure of the banks, which had got farmers into their clutches during the war years, was the main grievance. Many farmers were now mere servant boys of the banks, and, unable to maintain the payment of their interest instalments, were being sold up.

In these circumstances the first Working Farmers' Conference came together in the Town Hall, Galway, on April 5, 1930. Sean Hayes, of Clare, presided, and delegates came from Galway, Tirconail, Clare, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon and Limerick. The conference elected delegates to the first European Peasants' Congress in Berlin; it greeted the preparatory work for the launching of a revolutionary workers' party in Ireland; and,

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<sup>6</sup> Peadar O'Donnell: *Plan of Campaign for Irish Working Farmers*, Dublin, 1931.

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after each delegate had told stories of the local fight, laid down the policy of the now inaugurated Working Farmer Committee Movement in the following resolution :

“ This Irish Working Farmers’ Congress declares the exaction of annuities, which are landlordism under another name, to be as objectionable as were the old rents, and warns the political parties that the working farmers are not interested in the legal quibbles nor slushy talk about moral obligations in this matter; these charges are an injustice and should end. . . . This Congress instructs the National Committee to proceed with the organisation of the working farmers of Ireland on the basis of our platform by forming committees of action in the villages and townlands which will conduct the everyday struggle of the working farmers, expose and prevent imperialist terrorism, organise meetings, demonstrations, etc., to explain our programme and methods of struggle.”

The Committees played a leading part in several local struggles in the West, and although there was no consistent drive to transform them into a really national movement, an intensive campaign was carried on around Matt Kent’s imprisonment in July, 1931. It was a particularly gross case. Matt Kent was a working farmer of the County Wexford. He was a splendid old fighter; in 1916 he led out ten pikemen from his townland to take part in the Rising. He refused to pay rent for his holding, claiming that British bondholders had no title to tribute from Irish land. Bailiffs evicted him, and he

regained possession of his house by force. Civic Guards then descended upon the farm, and Matt Kent was arrested and sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. A Defence Committee was set up, and though its agitation did not succeed in freeing Matt Kent, it spread the details of his imprisonment to every county in Ireland, and thousands of workers and working farmers welcomed him at a mass demonstration after his release.

It was a tribute to their potentialities that the Working Farmers' Committees were outlawed under the Coercion Act passed by the Cosgrave Government in 1931.

In February, 1932, a Fianna Fail Government replaced Cumann na nGaedheal in Southern Ireland. It is impossible to deal here with the new Government's agrarian measures. It withheld the annuities from Britain, but insisted that they must be paid to the Dublin Exchequer. A year's moratorium was granted on arrears,<sup>7</sup> a certain price was guaranteed in order to encourage the growing of wheat, and the graziers were awarded cattle subsidies as an offset to the British tariff barriers.

The chief features of the agrarian struggle in 1932 were the shower of decrees for non-payment of annuities (working farmers unable to pay and big farmers unwilling to pay for political reasons were alike proceeded against); the battle of the Limerick fishermen who defied

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<sup>7</sup> As part of election propaganda in January, 1933, Mr. de Valera agreed to reduce all annuities by one-half and to fund all arrears as long-term debts, payable at 6d. per half-year for every £1 so funded. About £250,000, representing arrears over three years old, was also wiped off as a bad debt after the return of the second Fianna Fail Government.

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water bailiffs and bayonet-armed police in order to fish the prohibited Shannon tail-race; and the resistance of Republican workers to an eviction at Kinnity, in Offaly. In this latter struggle a landless man named Pat Craven was to be evicted from the lodge he had occupied for thirteen years. When the bailiffs and police arrived they found the lodge sandbagged and occupied by thirty-five men armed with heavy sticks. On the door of the lodge was posted the proclamation of the Irish Republic of 1916 and a notice stating :

“ While members of the Executive Council ignore Craven, who is in the lodge for thirteen years, we Republicans feel it our duty to prevent his eviction. In doing so we have taken over possession of his premises, with his consent, and we mean to stand by him despite the consequences. If a change of Government means a continued freedom for the bailiff-vulture and the house wreckers, well then, goodbye liberty! No tribute to Britain! Down with the landlords new and old! Down with the Land Commissions! The land for the people! No rent from the small farmers! Down with the robber banking system. Workers and working farmers unite! ”

Craven was evicted finally only after negotiations between Fianna Fail deputies, the sheriff and the Government had been used to trick the workers. The Craven family were ejected on the roadside, but the indignant people brought them back from the workhouse in which they had sought refuge, held protest meetings, and eventually placed them in a hut opposite their former home.

In Northern Ireland, the deepening crisis, reflected chiefly in the collapse of the cattle trade and the failure of flax-growing, compelled even branches of the Farmers' Union, the organisation of the well-to-do farmers, to demand a moratorium of payments, but the Six-county Government flatly refused such a concession.

Deep discontent also existed among the Ulster dairy farmers, who had fought a vigorous milk war in December, 1931, and had received an insignificant concession. "But there is a doubt as to whether the two shillings a gallon, now agreed upon, lays a firm basis for lasting peace. The producer is promised 1s. 4d. a gallon delivered in Belfast, but if he lives 35 miles from the city, he loses 3½d. of this, deducted for cartage. If his milk is pasteurised, 2d. is deducted per gallon. Arrangements for surplus milk are vague and it is not felt that this victory is likely to stimulate milk supply. The treaty was brought about through the intervention of the Prime Minister, after a milk famine had actually begun, violence had manifested itself and one life had been accidentally lost; but, though timely, it is feared it is only temporary and will demand an early revision."<sup>8</sup>

This situation, however, brings us to the point where a review of the world agrarian crisis and its effects on Ireland becomes necessary.

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<sup>8</sup> *Year Book of Agricultural Co-operation*. London, 1932.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE WORLD AGRARIAN CRISIS

THE beginnings of the world agrarian crisis were seen in 1920, when the period of war boom ended. The crisis was caused in the main by the impossibility of finding markets for the produce of the extra land brought under cultivation during the war, and became highly aggravated when the crisis in industry was superimposed upon it.

Cereals, accounting for more than a quarter of the world's agricultural produce have been severely affected. "Some years before the turn of the business cycle," says the League of Nations' *Review of World Production*, in its characteristic capitalist language, "consumption of certain cereals failed to keep pace with the increase in production.<sup>1</sup> Supplies tended to outstrip demand, particularly since 1928 (in the southern hemisphere 1928-29) when world harvests were of record size. Although the aggregate yield of the following year was just above the average, the bumper crops reaped in Europe, the principal importing continent, in conjunction with the stocks accumulated elsewhere, depressed the market and helped to bring about a universal slump in wheat prices. In 1930 (1930-31) total harvests were slightly more abundant than in the preceding year. Although the yield of

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<sup>1</sup> League of Nations: *Review of World Production*, 1925-1931, Geneva, 1932.

1931 (1931-32) was of less than average size, agricultural prices have, in general, not recovered. Various measures of artificial control—pools, farm boards, protective tariffs and milling laws—have ultimately proved ineffective in maintaining prices, especially in cereal producing countries, while during the depression, demand has not expanded, in spite of the fall in prices.”

The following figures show how the world's wheat stocks (in millions of quintals) have accumulated since 1925 :<sup>2</sup>

August, 1925 ...	114.0	August, 1930 ...	220.2
August, 1928 ...	160.6	August, 1931 ...	246.0
August, 1929 ...	233.5		

The last figure is the highest in the history of the wheat trade! Barley, oats, maize, and rye have suffered likewise, although efforts were made to curtail their production. “In spite of the considerable decrease in supplies, the prices of most cereals continued to slump in 1930 and 1931.”<sup>3</sup> There is a similar crisis in the production of rice, the staple food of one-third of mankind. “The depression in the rice market has greatly affected the purchasing power of the Asiatic rice-exporting countries.”<sup>4</sup> The output of rice increased less than that of wheat until 1929-30 and probably not more rapidly than the rice-eating population. In 1930-31, however, the total

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<sup>2</sup> Stanford University: *Wheat Studies*, 1932.

<sup>3</sup> League of Nations: *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Here we see the inter-reactions of the industrial and agrarian crises.

crops rose by six per cent. During the depression years the demand for rice has been considerably reduced.”<sup>5</sup> Sugar has been affected by two factors: “beet-sugar production has been largely stimulated, especially in European countries, by protective duties and subsidies . . . and . . . cane-sugar production has recently been stimulated by propagation of a new variety of cane which has greatly increased the yield of sugar per acre. . . . With all the sugar-exporting countries trying to expand their markets, and the importing countries attempting to make themselves independent of foreign supplies and in fact reducing their consumption, large stocks have accumulated and prices have fallen heavily.”<sup>6</sup> World stocks of sugar (in millions of quintals) have leaped as follows:

December 31, 1926...	37.0	December 31, 1929...	57.0
December 31, 1927...	41.3	December 31, 1930...	71.3
December 31, 1928...	44.9	December 31, 1931...	87.2

One further instance of the glutted agricultural market. The world's stocks of coffee (in millions of quintals) have increased as follows:

March 31, 1926	...	5.2	March 31, 1931	...	17.0
March 31, 1929	...	9.4	February 29, 1932	...	20.5
March 31, 1930	...	16.5			

And how do the rulers of this “best of all possible worlds” deal with these bulging coffee sacks which

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<sup>5</sup> League of Nations: *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> League of Nations: *Ibid.*



cannot be sold? Remember that millions of people desire to drink coffee, but cannot afford to buy it. Says the League of Nations *Review* already cited :

“Brazil has made repeated attempts to control the coffee market by means of various valorisation schemes. After the breakdown of the Coffee Defence Plan in October, 1929, an international loan was raised and a new plan adopted with a view to liquidating existing stocks and placing future crops gradually on the market, but this scheme collapsed in turn in April, 1931. Since then, a new policy of gradually destroying low grades of coffee (7,200,000 quintals by August 1, 1932) has been adopted and an emergency tax imposed upon coffee exports in order to finance the purchase and distribution of surplus coffee”!

George Bernard Shaw has suggested that probably this earth is the lunatic asylum of another planet. He forgot to qualify his epigram. He should have added—under capitalism. A world starving in the midst of abundance! Thousands of tons of coffee disappearing in smoke in Brazil; American granaries crammed and farmers praying that the harvest will fail, while millions line up for bread and soup! And this is “civilisation.”

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<sup>1</sup> I give without comment the following extract from the *Irish Trade Journal*, December, 1932: “It is reported in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of November 22 that in consequence of the over-production of butter, the Danish interests affected are planning to destroy a number of dairy cattle in the same manner as other countries have already destroyed grain, vegetables, coffee, tobacco and flowers. The Danish Agricultural Council and the co-operative

In direct ratio to mounting stocks, agricultural prices have tumbled down. The following table shows the percentage decline in agricultural prices indices of a number of countries between January, 1929, and January, 1932 :

Canada <sup>8</sup>	...	...	52	Argentina	...	...	42
U.S.A.	...	...	50	Italy	...	...	35
New Zealand	...	...	44	Germany	...	...	30
Poland	...	...	42	Great Britain <sup>9</sup>	...	...	19

I quote the League of Nations *Review* once more :

“The decline has been particularly severe in countries producing chiefly cereals and textiles, and rather less in meat and dairy-producing countries, and in those which have taken special measures to protect domestic agriculture. The decline in agricultural purchasing power suggested by the above table has been compensated to only a limited extent by the fall in prices of commodities purchased by farmers. In the United States of America, for example, non-agricultural commodities have fallen by only 26 per cent. in the period to which the above table relates; fertilisers have fallen 20 to 25 per cent. and agri-

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slaughter houses and beef-exporting associations have come to an agreement whereby the number of Danish cattle is to be reduced without unfavourable consequences for the beef market. The intention is to deliver to the destructor within the next few weeks, fourteen thousand head of dairy cattle to be turned into meat for use as pig food. The hides, etc., will be sold. The expenses of this undertaking are to be borne mainly by the Danish butter exporters.”

<sup>8</sup> August, 1929, to January, 1932.

<sup>9</sup> Sterling prices.

cultural implements by only two per cent. In Canada, consumers' goods other than foodstuffs have fallen by only 13 per cent., and fertilisers by the same amount; in Poland, industrial goods dropped by only 28 per cent., and in Germany chemical fertilisers fell by 18 per cent. It has already been pointed out that, in the earlier period of the depression, price relationships were relatively favourable to meat and dairy-farming; the effect of the shift of production to these relatively high-priced commodities for which demand is sensitive to economic conditions may be illustrated by the following figures: in 1931, wholesale meat prices in the United States of America declined by 32 per cent. as compared with 19 per cent. in 1930: cereals fell by 34 and 27 per cent. in 1930 and 1931 respectively. In Canada, prices of field crops fell by 54 per cent. in 1930 and only two per cent. in 1931: animal crops fell by 17 and 24 per cent. respectively. In Yugoslavia, vegetable products declined in price 29 per cent. in 1930 and three per cent. in 1931, and animal products 10 and 32 per cent. in these years."

Two phenomena of importance in Ireland are here described. First, the "agricultural scissors": the disproportionate fall in the prices which the farmer receives for his produce and the prices which he pays for the manufactured goods he must buy. We shall investigate the "scissors" a little more fully in specific relation to Ireland. Second phenomenon: the recent general shift from tillage to animal-rearing, caused by the greater fall in the prices of field crops, which were affected earlier by the crisis. A rancher country such as Ireland naturally

came into the world whirlpool later than wheat-producing countries like Canada, although it was inevitable that the slight advantage would soon be lost. It was this phenomenon that provided the basis for Cosgrave's hollow "prosperity" boast—a boast made when the Free State was already on the brink of the ravine.

So far I have shown the crisis in figures. A few quotations from various sources will help to give a more living picture of the effects of the crisis on the small farmers of the capitalist countries. A correspondent of *The Times* related recently his experiences during a tour of Lincolnshire and Norfolk. His article portrays well the crisis in Britain.<sup>10</sup>

"Barley and sheep are the mainstays of the farmer on the light arable lands of the Lincolnshire wolds. Both are practically unsaleable to-day. The increased duty on beer, coupled with the reduced purchasing power of the public, has killed the malt and barley trade. Some barley is being sold for grinding at a heavy loss to growers, and the demand is limited. Sheep prices have fallen, as everyone knows, to a desperately low level this autumn, and to-day no one wants the Lincoln long-wool breed. The farmers on the wolds and heaths are at their wits' end to carry on and meet their obligations. There has been a crop of bankruptcy sales lately, and the general opinion is that many more will go under at Lady Day, the close of the farming year in Lincolnshire. . . . Norfolk farming is really in an appalling plight.

<sup>10</sup> *Times Weekly Edition*, November 10, 1932.

Farmers, land-owners, bankers, auctioneers, accountants, and merchants all say that they dread a general financial crash after Christmas. Where forced sales have taken place farms normally worth £20 an acre have sold for £4 an acre, and even as low as 35s. an acre. There were no buyers."

In Germany, the small farmer is being as ruthlessly wiped out by mechanised large-scale capitalist farming as were the tenant farmers of Ireland by "consolidations" in the second half of last century. Government statistics show how the peasantry are being evicted from their holdings:

<i>Year ending</i>					<i>Area of farms sold up in</i>
<i>March 31</i>					<i>Germany (in hectares)<sup>11</sup></i>
1925	...	...	...	...	2,200
1926	...	...	...	...	9,600
1927	...	...	...	...	36,000
1928	...	...	...	...	38,000
1929	...	...	...	...	50,700
1930	...	...	...	...	117,000
1931	...	...	...	...	160,000

An official report by the President of Trier, published in the spring of 1931, gives a picture of the peasantry's conditions that reads almost as of our own Gaeltacht: "The agricultural population of the poor districts in Eifel and Hochwald lives chiefly on potatoes and bread, because eggs, butter, milk and even the meat which they slaughter themselves must be exchanged for

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<sup>11</sup> One hectare equals 2.471 acres.

the most indispensable needs. As a result of this the health of the agricultural population has deteriorated in a terrifying manner, above all, that of the children. The number of deaths from consumption in the district of Trier amounted to 10.9 per cent. as against an average of 8.6 per cent. in the remainder of Prussia. The situation in the wine-growing area is fearful. More than one-half of the small grape-growers live on an average income of approximately 1,200 marks,<sup>12</sup> of which some 50 per cent. goes in working costs."

In Czecho-Slovakia, hunger is so rampant among the peasants of the mountainy Carpathian-Ukraine that the capitalist press, performing a little geographic sleight-of-hand, has repeatedly used reports of the terrible conditions there as "exposures" of the Soviet Union! With the deepening crisis, the crowbar brigade have become increasingly familiar and hated in the villages, and there have been pitched battles with the gendarme keepers of law and order. A Czecho-Slovakian writer paints the following frightful picture of conditions:<sup>13</sup>

"Some years ago the Communist deputies exhibited in Parliament the black and glutinous bread made of barley, clover, and bran, but which for the Ukrainian peasants is a delicacy. Since then even this bread has disappeared from the villages of Vrchovina. When the delegation of the Workers' International Relief wanted

<sup>12</sup> About £60 at par.

<sup>13</sup> Georg Friedrich: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. XII., No. 50.

to buy such bread in order to give it to the peasants, there was only one rich man in the village who possessed some. And this year the harvest is less than the amount sown. The result is: hunger-typhus, hunger œdema. The only food of the peasants consists of potatoes and cabbage leaves boiled in water without any salt. Salt is an unobtainable luxury for the Ukrainian peasant. Carpathian Ukraine is rich in salt mines, but the peasant has no money to buy salt. The peasants make journeys of two days on foot in order to fetch salt water from a spring, on which, however, they have to pay a tax.

“In the most richly timbered district of Czecho-Slovakia, where the timber is rotting in the forests, the peasants have no wood as the forests belong to the State and the Latorica (a French joint stock company); the prisons are full of ‘criminals’ who have ventured to gather a few sticks of wood in the forest. In some districts 80 per cent. of the population have been fined for trespassing in the forest, and as the fines are sometimes as high as 500 crowns, the peasant must either borrow money, on which he has to pay ten per cent. interest a month, or go to prison.

“The land reform was carried out as follows: the total amount of land available was 768,000 acres. Of this the Franco-Czech joint stock company Latorica received 230,000 acres of forest and pasture land and 34,000 acres of arable land, so that to-day 27,000 small peasants with holdings of less than an acre own 1.5 per cent. of the land, 60,000 peasants with holdings of less than five

hectares own about 22 per cent., and 17,000 peasants with holdings of less than ten hectares own 17.6 per cent. And the remaining 58.9 per cent. of the land belongs to a handful of big capitalists, the Latorica and the State. Moreover, the land reform has been carried out in such a way that the whole of the forest and pasture land belongs to the Latorica and the State, and when the peasant requires fodder for his cow, he is compelled to pay an exorbitant sum to the Latorica."

And so alike are the working of private property rulership. In order to relieve this distress, an innocent Hungarian Archbishop collected a number of wagon-loads of maize, and dispatched them from his own country to Carpathian-Ukraine. The Czecho-Slovakian Custom authorities refused to allow the maize to enter free of duty, and sent it back to Hungary. One remembers the British Government and the ship-loads of yellow meal that came here in the black '47!

In Sweden, too, the crumbling of capitalism has plunged the working farmers and agricultural labourers into frightful poverty. The average daily wage of a permanent male labourer is 4.27 kronas in summer and 2.32 kronas in winter!<sup>14</sup> As for the working farmers, the following description by a Swedish writer is evidence enough:<sup>15</sup>

"The situation of the small holders is catastrophic. The prices of agricultural products are ten per cent.

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<sup>14</sup> A krone equals 1s. 2d. approximately.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Johanson: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. XII., No. 55.



lower at the present time than in 1913. The small farmers are in debt to eighty per cent. of the value of their property. The burden of taxation is greatest in those districts in which the greater part of the population consists of small holders. The interest due on the debts of the small holders amounts to a total of 250 million crowns yearly. New taxes have been imposed. In 1932 Parliament resolved upon a special tax upon milk. In the rural districts the housing conditions are especially bad. The number of forced sales of small holdings increases steadily: in 1914, 14; 1921, 157; 1927, 349; and 1929, 399. A letter sent to the king by thirty peasants from Oestervola in July, 1932, is typical of the position of the small farmers. They wrote: 'Thirty peasants in Oestervola are confronted with the immediate danger of being driven from their farms, which are to be seized for debt. . . . We therefore beg that the State power intervenes to prevent these distraints on the property of the small and middle farmers.'

"The small fishermen on the West coast have been reduced to such a state of poverty that school meals have had to be introduced, as the children came to school without having eaten anything. The hunger for land is very great. Last summer a 'Royal' Commission instituted an inquiry in this question, and came to the conclusion that there are a large number of small holders and forestry workers who should have more land if they are not to starve. But they have no money and can buy none, for their yearly income amounts to 500 crowns at most."

Italy is the Fascist paradise. What are conditions there? Nearly ten million people are engaged in Italian agriculture. Few, however, are peasant farmers; the majority are day labourers and tenants who take their holdings from the big landlords on the *metayer* system. The big estates of the landlords dominate the countryside.

“Scattered over these huge estates one sees miserable huts and tumbled-down houses. Here the share-croppers live. The big agrarian allows them the use of the land. They provide the agricultural instruments and above all the labour power. With the help of their wives, numerous children and their relatives, they cultivate the land. When the harvest is brought in, half of it belongs to the big agrarian. The share-croppers are obliged to work day and night. Their sleeping quarters are damp, mildewy and full of vermin. If the harvest is good, then the family will have enough to carry on until the next harvest. If the harvest is bad, their share will not suffice them until the next year. The family must give up the holding. Perhaps they may be lucky enough to find work as day labourers. At first, however, they must leave the country and go to the town, where they wander about begging until harvest-time comes round again.”<sup>16</sup>

The “great success” of the Fascist wheat policy may be pointed out; the daily organ of Fianna Fail has, in

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<sup>16</sup> P. J.: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. XII., No. 52.

fact, referred to it with warm approval. What is this policy? It may be summarised: increased cultivation, high protective duties, the obligatory milling of native wheat. Largely as a result of the better cultivation of the soil, a more scientific regulation of seed times, and the sowing of early ripening grain, the average yield per hectare has risen from 10.4 double centals before the war to 12.2 double centals in 1926 and 15.2 double centals in 1932.

But this increase in output has benefited nobody but the landlords and the big farmers who are able to grow wheat; the small men and the thousands of labourers have not gained a *pingin* by it, and the costs are borne by the consumers in general and the industrial workers in particular. High duties have kept the home price of wheat at double and treble the world market level, and this in a country where wages are far below those of most capitalist countries. In the same way, the ranchers are being spoon-fed by the huge duties on cattle, which were increased in September, 1932. The Italian workers and poorer peasants were never able to afford a deal of meat, but these new duties have almost completely prohibited any consumption of meat by the more indigent sections of the population.

The "scissors" already referred to in relation to world conditions certainly operate in favour of agriculture, but to the benefit only of the ranchers and landlords, and at the expense of the peasant farmers, the labourers who form by far the most numerous section of the agricultural population, and the industrial workers.

ITALIAN PRICE INDEX (AUGUST OF EACH YEAR)<sup>17</sup>

		1930		1931		1932
Agrarian index	... ..	413	... ..	330	... ..	332
General index	... ..	403	... ..	331	... ..	300

It remains to be said that as a result of her growing wheat cultivation Italy is now faced with the danger that has already materialised in France. In 1932 home requirements amounted to about eighty million double centals, while output had increased to 75,000,000 double centals; and consumption is decreasing steadily owing to the impoverishment of the masses. What of the immediate future? There is the same prospect of growing agrarian crisis as in the other capitalist countries; the cloven hoof of planless, anarchic capitalist production again betrays itself. Those branches of Italian agriculture which depend upon foreign markets are, in fact, already in the throes of the crisis. The measures for the protection of the currency and the restriction of consumption taken by Germany, Austria, Hungary and the central European countries which formerly purchased Italian wines, fruit and early vegetables have slashed Italy's exports considerably, while forcing down prices in addition.

Mussolini, then, has scarcely led the working people of Italy into the promised land. Fascism, being not a different social order, but a distinctive phase of dying capitalism, is powerless to insulate Italy from the world crisis of the system. The methods of the ruling class

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<sup>17</sup> Agrarian Institute, Rome: *Bulletin*, September, 1932.

of Italy in their attempt to solve the crisis are as hackneyed as those of their brethren throughout the capitalist world—the burdens are passed on to the working population. The rural toilers of Italy, therefore, are as hard-hit by the crisis as their comrades elsewhere.

One final picture of rural conditions internationally—in “the land of the free,” the land of which the Irish emigrant once sang:

*They say there's bread and work for all,  
And the sun shines always there.*

For decades now Ireland's most flourishing export industry, the shipping of the manhood and womanhood of the country to the United States especially, has been balanced (more or less) by an equally important, equally crazy import, the registered letters that came to the “old people” at home. The registered letter was evidence that the youngsters were doing well. When within recent years it failed to arrive in thousands of homes, and instead there came stories of bread lines and hunger marches, Ireland had another unpleasant reminder of the international character of the crisis.

Why is it that even America's agriculture is in crisis? Here is a country with almost inexhaustible natural resources, Cræsus-rich in live-stock, possessing a technique superior to any other capitalist country, and with a great home market for its produce without exporting a pound of canned meat or a bushel of wheat. Yet the agriculture of the United States is also plunged into the

Slough of Despond. In America we see the same forces at work as are ruining the working farmers of Ireland.

The United States census of 1930 showed that despite its highly industrialised character, America has a great rural population; 10,500,000 persons were engaged in agriculture, with a total farming population of approximately 30,000,000. The census reveals also (the necessary excavations having been carried out) the manner in which the crisis is affecting these 30,000,000 people: the ruin and swallowing up of the small farms, the development of large scale farming with more and more mechanical improvements, and the servitude of American agriculture as a whole to the Big Business interests of Wall Street.

The outlook of the small and middle farmers becomes more hopeless with each harvest. Prices have fallen to sixty per cent. of pre-war levels, yet farmers are paying taxes which are 266 per cent. of pre-war. Bank debts and mortgages, fixed on the basis of the inflated valuation of former years, become more burdensome with the fall of prices. Debts and taxes are estimated to-day to be three-quarters of the cost of production on the smaller farms. Added to this, freight rates have risen 153 per cent. since 1914. In the attempt to stave off the day of reckoning, farmers have taken out further mortgages; the total mortgage debt rose from \$7,857,700,000 in 1920 to \$9,241,390,000 in 1930.

Naturally, this increased load of debt has resulted in wholesale bankruptcy and sales by distraint. Between 1925 and 1930 roughly twenty-four per cent. of all farms

were sold up; there were 45,000 forced sales in 1929, 54,000 in 1930, and 100,000 in 1931; while in April, 1932, 40,000 farm homes fell under the hammer in a single day in the State of Mississippi. Senator Harrison, of Mississippi, defending his State bailiffs before the United States Senate Finance Committee, declared: "Other States are in exactly the same position. The difference is that what Mississippi did in one day other States are doing piecemeal." The fact is, that many poor farmers in America have still a roof over their head because the Banks and the Insurance Companies into whose clutches the holdings have fallen would be unable to dispose of them if they were seized.

How do technical improvements affect the smaller American farmers? Take the wheat prairies of the Middle West. For years the binder and the migratory worker had dominated the harvest. Then the combine arrived. The hobo worker was driven out; he was now as unnecessary as the combine was essential. Thousands of farmers bought machines from the International Harvesting Co., mortgaging their farms to do so, and by 1930 the number of mortgaged owner-worked farms in the five grain States had increased from 52 to 67 per cent. Thousands of migratory labourers, therefore, lost their livelihood as a result of this example of man's ingenuity; the farmers themselves were the next to come under the axe. An official publication<sup>18</sup> gives the average cost of wheat production as \$1.25 a bushel, and for tractor-

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture: *Year Book*, New York, 1931.

worked farms 80 cents per bushel; yet the wheat price in Chicago in 1932 never reached 50 cents a bushel.

Remember the farmers of the Middle West who had mortgaged themselves to the combine trust, and who, in addition, were crushed by State taxes. What was their position? Montana is an example of the results of technical progress under a system that produces for profit and not for use. Since 1920 Montana's wheat farmers have dwindled from 35,000 to 14,000, and these 14,000 now produce more wheat than the larger number, yet they are unable to keep their heads above water. Let us look at another example: the dairy and mixed farming area of the north-eastern States. Traced on the map, the area runs from Minnesota on the Canadian border down to Ohio, across to the Virginian coast, and up to Maine. It is the oldest of the agricultural districts, with 41 per cent. of the total farming population. Once the majority of the farms of the area were self-sufficing; now Big Business has smashed their old "family character," and has swept them into the whirlpool of capitalist market relations. The banks collect the annual interest on their loans; the insurance companies, their mortgage blood money; the machine trusts, the instalments on the tractors and milkers bought by hire-purchase; and oil-cake companies, the payment for artificial foods, necessary to augment the food produced on the farms themselves. Then the railroads whisk away the farmer's milk to the cities, to be sold by distributors at fourteen cents a quart—milk for which he has received four cents a quart, and of which the average production cost, accord-



ing to official figures issued by the State of Massachusetts, is six cents!

Naturally, the result of this is a growing crop of bankruptcies and forced sales; in the State of Iowa alone a total of 353,388 acres was sold up between 1921 and 1930. The insurance companies then take over, level houses, "consolidate" in the good old Irish way, and operate "chain-farming." Hired labourers are moved from area to area, the tractors and other machinery go with them, and there is no permanent population in the area.

As for the plight of agricultural labourers in the United States, the figures of wages are sufficient. In 1920 the average daily rate with board was \$2.84 per day; in 1931 it was \$1.33. In the southern States, plantation owners are hiring men for fifty cents a day; and thousands of workers cannot get even such a job. Says the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its *Outlook for 1932*: "Reports indicate that there has been an accentuated movement from cities to the country in search of cheap food and shelter. This movement has augmented the supply of available farm labour that may be obtained in some places *with little or no payment other than subsistence.*"

Such is technical progress in American agriculture! Thousands of tons of Californian fruit are dumped into the Pacific. Grain is used as fuel in Indiana, and in Louisiana thousands of acres of cabbages are left to rot. The Farm Board recommends the ploughing down of every third row of cotton. Two hundred million bushels

of "surplus" wheat overflow the Government granaries. Yet starving farmers must hunger march to Washington! And American imperialism plumbs the depths of degradation, in the cry of its prostitute press: "Back to the old methods; back to the horse!"

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IRELAND AND THE CRISIS

“**G**ONE are the days of talking of farmers in general,” said a writer in the *Irish Workers’ Voice* recently; “the knife of capitalist development in general and the razor of the world crisis of capitalism in particular have carved a very clear line between the thatched and slated houses, between those who sit in the front pew and those who steal in about the porch on Sunday, between the farmer who sends his son to Maynooth or Trinity and he who sends his sons to harvest in Britain or seek a livelihood in New York.”<sup>1</sup>

These class divisions in the countryside must be borne in mind when considering the agrarian crisis in Ireland, and the revolution in agrarian technique that has taken place over the last few years, for this technical revolution affects the various sections of the farming community very differently.

In Ireland a few years ago farming equipment was of the most primitive kind. For wheat and oats, it comprised the sowing plough, the tooth harrow, the stone roller, the scythe, the hired thresher and the winnowing machine. To-day, these simple machines have developed into far more specialised and efficient instruments. The sowing plough has become the drill plough, which, with

<sup>1</sup> Sean Murray: *Irish Workers’ Voice*, October 22, 1932.

the grubber, takes over and supplements some of the functions of the harrow. The harrow has branched into spring, disc and tooth varieties. Iron has replaced stone for the roller. The scythe has given way to the mowing machine for hay and to some extent to the more highly developed reaper and binder for corn. The steam threshing mill has replaced the threshing and winnowing machines, and has united their two functions. In other countries technical progress, as was pointed out in the previous chapter, has been much more far-reaching. Tractors and combines, huge lorries, silos and elevators, monocultures, electric power, chemical fertilisers and dry farming indicate the progress of agriculture to industrialised mass production. Stock-raising has developed no less. New foods and feeding methods have been introduced; improvements have been made in breeding; the period necessary to reach maturity has been shortened; dairy products have been standardised and placed under control, with a consequent increase in the annual milk production, and a jump even in the number of eggs laid annually by hens—a jump from about seventy to 141 in County Limerick, 194 in a Saorstat egg-laying competition, and 180-220 in Germany and elsewhere.

Agriculture has made great strides, therefore; its output is much higher than formerly. Who has benefited by this increase? To discover this, it is necessary to look at a number of statistics. The most important means of agricultural production is the land. Who owns it in Ireland? The Saorstat *Statistical Abstract* for 1932 shows

that the land of the Free State is divided as follows among the various holdings :

		<i>Number of Farms</i>		<i>Acreage</i>	
Under	1 acre ...	...	44,610 ...	37,900	
	1 to 5 acres ...	...	30,687 ...	99,800	
	5 to 10 „ ...	...	35,336 ...	300,000	
	10 to 15 „ ...	...	38,026 ...	513,400	
	15 to 30 „ ...	...	90,363 ...	2,093,600	
	30 to 50 „ ...	...	62,267 ...	2,476,300	
	50 to 100 „ ...	...	49,873 ...	3,546,900	
	100 to 200 „ ...	...	21,081 ...	2,898,100	
	Above 200 „ ...	...	7,947 ...	3,038,400	
					<hr/>
					17,024,500
					<hr/>

So it will be seen that despite all the talk of “ the land for the people,” despite the heroic battles of the Land League days and the stream of Land Acts that has followed, the land of the Free State is yet far from belonging to the Irish working farmers. Holdings over 100 acres constitute over one-third of the total farm land, while the 7,947 holdings over 200 acres own more land than all the 259,622 holdings at the other end of the scale put together—the holdings of the men with between one to fifteen acres. In the six Northern counties there is much the same position. According to the *Ulster Year Book* for 1932 the land of Northern Ireland is held as follows :—

				<i>Number of Farms</i>		<i>Acreage</i>
1 to	5 acres	...	...	11,451	...	40,167
5 to	10 „	...	...	15,557	...	126,675
10 to	15 „	...	...	13,473	...	177,967
15 to	30 „	...	...	27,740	...	631,099
30 to	50 „	...	...	16,555	...	654,377
50 to	100 „	...	...	11,446	...	781,436
100 to	200 „	...	...	2,980	...	388,321
Above	200 „	...	...	931	...	432,355
				<hr/>		<hr/>
				100,133		3,232,377
				<hr/>		<hr/>

The position of the working farmers is just as bad in regard to the machinery and implements owned by the various holdings. The latest figures available are, unfortunately, for June 1, 1917, and since then not only has agrarian technique made great strides, but the gap in equipment between the large and small farms has widened in proportion. Nevertheless, the table given here shows clearly the class divisions in ownership of machinery. In all Ireland only 133 holdings of under ten acres, for instance, possessed a potato digger; there were 10,555 potato diggers on farms of from 50 to 500 acres. All farms under ten acres owned only 999 winnowers or fanners; there were 31,476 of these machines on farms of from 50 to 500 acres. The holders of under ten acres owned only 52 corn crushers in all; the holders of over 50 acres were in possession of 4,678 corn crushers. So it continues through the entire table. The middle farmer can afford the simpler and more inexpensive

machines; the poor farmers find their way to technical progress and greater efficiency barred by lack of capital. "The small figures for the very small holdings presumably mean that less efficient implements are used (the spade in place of the plough, the scythe instead of the mower, etc.), not that co-operation exists to any appreciable extent."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, it is only by toiling from dawn to dark, putting into their holdings every ounce of labour-power, in an attempt to make up for their primitive technique, that the working farmers can keep their heads above water. Only the big capitalist farmers can afford modern implements; technical progress means not relief from labour for the small and middle farmers, but increased competition from the big capitalist farms.

The same tale is to be told of the live stock on the various sizes of holdings. In 1912, the only year for which full figures are available for all Ireland, we find that the poor farmers holding under fifteen acres owned together only 75,405 horses; the much smaller number of big farmers having over fifty acres possessed no less than 305,330 horses. There is even a bigger gap when we turn to cattle and sheep. The holders of under fifteen acres owned a total of 580,177 cattle; the holders of over fifty acres owned over four times as many—2,551,348. The holders of under fifteen acres possessed only 276,676 sheep; the big men with over fifty acres

<sup>2</sup> *Agricultural Statistics, 1847-1926*. Saorstat Stationery Office, 1930.

possessed nearly ten times as many—a total of 2,575,923 sheep. Even in the number of pigs held—and the pig is predominantly the animal of the working and middle farmer—the land-grabbers hold the advantage. The small man with under fifteen acres owned a total of 272,659 pigs; the men of over fifty acres owned 444,352. It is only when we turn to poultry that the poor farmer for the first time outstrips the man at the other end of the table! Holders of under fifteen acres possessed 7,905,448 poultry; the holders of over fifty acres possessed 6,487,063 poultry.

A later table for the Free State shows that on June 1, 1926, the contrast between the classes in the countryside in ownership of livestock was as great as ever.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, these class differences in ownership of land, etc., are reflected in the share of the total agricultural produce. According to the census taken by the Saorstát in 1926, there were 672,129 persons engaged in agriculture that year in the twenty-six county area. The value of the total agricultural produce for the year was £64,757,000, of which £50,500,000 was accounted by live stock and live stock products. How was this £64,000,000 shared? The 284,468 holders of less than thirty acres took £18,000,000 or about £63 each. The 248,535 men holding more than thirty acres took £39,000,000 or about £150 apiece. For the 139,104 labourers there was left £7,000,000, or about £50 each.

We can now investigate the progress of the crisis in

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<sup>3</sup> See Table VI.



Ireland, and its effect on the different sections of the farming population. During the war and the years immediately following, many farms installed new machinery, such as threshers, reapers and churners. They looked forward to an uninterrupted period of prosperity, and so borrowed money in order to carry out the necessary improvements. The pricking of the war boom plunged them further into debt, tightening the grip of the Banks on them, and in many cases driving them off the land altogether. The deepening of the crisis in recent months has aggravated the position of the working farmers, for while the slump in the cattle trade endangers the profits of the graziers, the price fall menaces the very life of the small man. As an illustration of the catastrophic fall in agricultural prices we can take the following official table for the Free State :<sup>4</sup>

AGRICULTURAL PRICES IN SAORSTAT

(Basis 1911-13—100)

September, 1929	...	...	138.2
September, 1930	...	...	129.9
September, 1931	...	...	104.4
September, 1932	...	...	89.7

A more exhaustive picture of the fall is afforded by the table given here also, showing the prices of the various kinds of farm produce. The effect of the price fall is heightened by the operations of the "scissors," the phenomenon already examined in its world aspect. The

<sup>4</sup> Saorstat Stationery Office: *Irish Trade Journal*, December, 1932.

working farmer received in September, 1932, over eleven points less for his produce than he received before the war; he paid in the same month fifty-five points more for the goods he purchased—an adverse balance against agriculture of 66.8 points. The following table for the Saorstat reveals the growing disparity between the price and cost of living indices:<sup>5</sup>

## COST OF LIVING INDEX

(Basis July, 1914=100)

October, 1926	...	189	October, 1930	...	168
October, 1927	...	175	November, 1931	...	165
October, 1928	...	176	November, 1932	...	155
October, 1929	...	179			

The full effect of the “scissors,” however, is not shown by the above table, for foodstuffs which the working farmer sells and does not purchase—butter, milk, etc.—are included in the group of commodities that form the basis of the cost of living index. It is these articles of farm produce that have decreased in value; while the cost of manufactured goods has increased—the retail price of boots, for instance, increased by 4.3 per cent. between November, 1931, and November, 1932. The “scissors” are one of the measures by which capitalism exploits the agricultural toilers; the firm of Guinness, for example, pays a lessening amount for its raw materials—barley, etc.—yet receives almost as much for its porter as in the post-war period of inflated prices.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

But this is one of the indirect methods of fleecing the rural toilers. There are others which do not "put a tooth in it" at all. A table has been given illustrating the annuity burdens: this can be expanded by appending the other forms of exploitation. Elinor Burns, in *British Imperialism in Ireland*, tabulates thus the amounts taken annually by imperialism and capitalism out of agriculture in the South:

Annuities	... ..	£3,250,000
Rent on unpurchased land	...	£1,500,000
Interest on mortgages	... ..	£1,500,000
Farming profits (large farms)	...	£14,000,000
Taxation of working farmers	...	£6,000,000
Commercial and financial profits from farming transactions	...	£11,000,000
		<hr/> £38,250,000

Alongside this bleeding of the country toilers by capitalism as a whole, the capitalist State, both in the Free State and the North, takes legislative steps to improve the position of the big farmers. "Centralised selling and credit agencies, including the co-operative creameries, and legislation controlling the grading of products and the standardisation of cattle, operate in the interests of the large farmer, and lead to the consolidation of capitalist agriculture."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Elinor Burns: *British Imperialism in Ireland*, Dublin, 1931.

The central credit agency in the Free State deserves special mention. In 1927 the Agricultural Credits Corporation, Ltd., was established to "assist" the farmers. The fifth annual general meeting of the Corporation, on December 17, 1932, revealed the grip it has already secured on agriculture. It had loaned over £1,000,000 to 9,000 farmers at *six per cent.*, and since its inception had paid a dividend of five per cent. to the financial interests controlling it—a total profit of £108,591. The Corporation is now extending its activities, and is financing the purchase of milking machines and seed wheat; and a new capital issue is being made.

The Chairman, at the annual meeting referred to, warned the farmers who were finding it difficult to pay their instalments, that action would be taken against them. "The directors," he said, "recognise that the farmers are passing through a very difficult time, and on that account are very reluctant to expose borrowers to legal costs in order to collect overdue instalments on loans, but they must insist on borrowers honouring their obligations." Another point from the same speech has not escaped the attention of the shopkeepers: should a farmer who has borrowed go bankrupt, the Corporation has first claim on his land and gear; the little shopkeeper who has afforded credit can claim only from what is left by finance-capital.

The picture of life to-day among the working farmers of Ireland is, therefore, a grim one. They try to shoulder their burdens by lengthening their working hours, and by paying the exploiting groups the money which is

actually their wages. They are not socially insured, and sickness in the family adds new debts for doctors' fees and medicines. The pennies for the children's school books are an additional grievance. The crisis has dried up the remittances from America, and has bottled up the youth of the country; emigration has ceased. The working farmer's home can make no allowance for cultural needs; books and newspapers never enter thousands of cottages; a visit to a cinema or a ceilidhe is a luxury for the youngsters. So a working farmer can cry out: "I am what would be called a small farmer. I am the envy of all the landless men around. They do not see our empty cupboards, our bare table, or our tightened belts. Some years ago there were loaves cooling on the window-sill at all times of the day. Now the daily loaf is never given time to cool by ten hungry mouths which eagerly devour it. And do not think that I am the worst off in the parish. There are hundreds of cases far worse off than mine."<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the working farmers, there are, in Northern Ireland, 34,791 agricultural labourers, and in the Soarstat, 126,409 labourers, mainly employed on the capitalist farms of over fifty acres. The exploitation of these workers has always been particularly brutal, but within recent years their wage standards have been steadily driven down. An official table shows that the average earnings during a week in July in each year, 1925 to 1931, of permanent male labourers over twenty-

<sup>7</sup> Tomas Maire Eoin: *An Phoblacht*, September 17, 1932.

one years of age who were not provided with a free house or food allowance of any kind, fell from 23s. 6d. to 22s. in Ulster, and from 26s. 3d. to 24s. 3d. in the Free State. Similar low rates of wages apply to labourers and female farm servants receiving board and lodging.<sup>8</sup>

But gross as is the exploitation revealed by these official figures, it is but part of the truth. In East Donegal, labourers who receive no more than 2s. 6d. a week and their food are compelled to pay 5s. 6d. a week rent for cottages which in many cases have been condemned as unfit for habitation, according to a witness at the Tenants' Cottages Commission.<sup>9</sup> In Westmeath, said another witness, Mr. M. J. Kennedy, T.D., before the same Commission, "the labourers are in a state of serfdom."<sup>10</sup> Mr. Kennedy stated that he had collected evidence as to the farm labourers in the county :

" And although there are, of course, exceptions, the average wages for labourers, indoor, are 7s. a week. Recently labourers have been dismissed and a number of large farmers with up to three hundred acres have reduced the wages of the men they board in their houses to 5s. a week. In fact, in some cases they make the labourer pay for insurance stamps out of his 5s. a week. These are single men. The wages of married men, outdoor—that is, not getting their food from the farmer—

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<sup>8</sup> See Table VII.

<sup>9</sup> *Irish Times*, December 11, 1932.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Press*, December 12, 1932.

vary from 10s. to 15s. a week. Last year the wages were 15s. to £1, but there has been an all-round reduction. The sooner men in such a position are given extra land to enable them to eke out an existence the better."

The same witness asserted that there was plenty of land available in Westmeath for building purposes, and several large farms with upwards of 1,000 acres, but when the Sites Committee attempted to obtain a site for a cottage, with a half-acre plot, the farmer wanted to put the labourer "down among the bogs and rushes."

Of County Longford a labourer has given a terrible picture of the position of his class. "In the summer months, from March 1 to November 1, indoor workers (that is, men receiving board) get from 5s. to 9s. a week. In the winter they receive only 2s. 6d. to 5s. Men who board themselves get only from 12s. to 25s. a week, and many a worker getting this miserable sum has to keep a wife and family. Hours are terrible, from ten to thirteen a day in summer and about ten in winter. Six days a week, and a certain amount of work—in winter a lot—on Sundays. There is little or no time for physical or mental recreation. Although haymaking, etc., is hard the winter work is most difficult. Often up to the ankles in muck, and with the wind and sleet cutting into one. And there is no respite; unless there is an absolute blizzard, work we must. Finally, a grievance affecting every agricultural labourer in the country. We are not insured under the Unemployment Act, and even the Health Insurance Act is often evaded. So when we are thrown out on the road, there is no unemployment

benefit for us; we must either be maintained by relatives or starve."<sup>11</sup>

This latter problem is one of the most vital grievances of the farm labourers, for all during 1932 the ranchers and big farmers were dismissing batches of their workers, with a consequent increase in rural unemployment and an intensification of poverty revealed by no official figures. At the end of 1932 there were probably 40,000 unemployed agricultural workers in all Ireland.

The fishermen may well come under this survey, for the great majority have also their patches of land, with which they augment the slender livelihoods they can pluck out of the sea. The fishermen have suffered severely as a result of the crisis, as may be seen by the fall in the number of men and boats engaged in the fisheries. In Northern Ireland, in 1928 there were 217 boats and 676 persons solely employed, and 350 boats and 690 persons partly employed sea-fishing; by 1931 these numbers had been reduced to 174 boats and 507 men wholly employed, and 257 boats and 582 persons partly engaged. In the Free State in 1926 there were 1,272 boats and 4,708 men wholly employed in sea-fishing, and 3,035 boats and 9,301 partially employed; by 1930 these figures had fallen to 2,017 boats and 3,965 persons solely engaged, and 1,417 boats and 8,090 persons partly engaged.

The primitiveness of fishing technique provides one of

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<sup>11</sup> A correspondent in the *Irish Workers' Voice*, April 16, 1932.



the most damning indictments of rural Ireland under capitalism. In the Saorstat in 1930, for instance, there were only eleven steamboats employed, only 335 motor-boats, and over 3,000 sail and rowing boats: thousands of the best and most daring fishermen in the world compelled to take the sea in coracles and flats that have not improved a wit since Brian Borhoime.

In 1912 the Congested Districts Board took up the question, and loans were made to selected fishermen to enable them to acquire motor-boats and nets and other gear. The purchased vessels were then regarded as security for the repayment of the loans. Naturally, only the more well-to-do fishermen were granted these loans, and the needs of the poor men were unrelieved, but for the first time a few Irish boats were able to follow the herring round the coast and even, occasionally, to venture into the North Sea. With the withdrawal of the British steam trawlers and drifters for naval service in 1915, Irish fishermen found home and English markets clamouring for their catches, prices soared, and for a few years there was "easy money." Attracted by the prosperity, many part-time men gave up their potato patches and devoted their whole time to the sea. They thought the markets and the high prices would remain, and they invested all the money they had and went into debt in order to purchase motor-boats, engines and nets, for which they paid the exaggerated war prices. Let the Coimisiun na Gaeltachta tell the rest of the story:<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Coimisiun na Gaeltachta: *Report*, Dublin, 1925.

"In 1919, the British steam fishing vessels were released from naval service in England. They were rapidly refitted and made ready to resume fishing. In that year, therefore, two or three thousand steam vessels were trawling and drift-netting on the North Sea and other grounds which had been fallow during the four preceding years, and as a result enormous catches of prime fish were put on the British markets. The immediate result was, of course, a great decline in the value of the fish, principally herring and mackerel, landed by Irish boats. In 1918 Irish herrings averaged 27s. per cwt. at port of landing; in 1919 they averaged 15s. 7d.; in 1920, 13s., and so on downwards, to 10s. in 1925. In the same period, Irish mackerel dropped from 21s. per cwt. in 1918 to 10s. in 1920, and to 9s. 7d. in 1925.

"The fishermen continued fishing in spite of these adverse conditions, with the result that they went into debt in 1921 and 1922. At the same time they wore out their nets, which formed a costly part of their capital, purchased, as they were for the most part, in days of high prices. Added to the misfortune of collapsed markets was the most unusual failure of the mackerel and herring shoals to make their seasonal visits to our coasts in 1921 and 1922. Even, however, if the fish had arrived in 1922 it would have been difficult to get them to market, because during that year, and even well into 1923, the transport facilities to outlying western ports were cut off. Many of the recently evolved professional fishermen of Donegal, Galway, Cork and Kerry found themselves, in 1923, with three years' heavy

arrears on their loans, with their boats and engines in need of outlay to render them fit to start again, and, most serious of all, with their gear worn out. They became disheartened and gave up looking to the sea for a livelihood."

And the assistance rendered by the newly-established Government of native capitalism? All loans were discontinued for several months in 1923, and when they were resumed the fishermen were compelled to provide "solvent securities" for repayment, and so, in most cases, were debarred altogether from assistance. And they fell further behind with their arrears, and were unable to keep their boats and engines in order; the paternal State stepped in and foreclosed on thirty-six of the vessels. The figures given above show that the deterioration of the fishing trade continues at present; capitalism can offer the fishermen no way out of their difficulties.

A word must be said, in conclusion, about the Gaeltacht—the fringes of the western seaboard speaking yet the old tongue—for in these latter times discussion of the Gaeltacht has developed into a veritable "codology" (to use the elegant term minted by Mr. Cosgrave). The Free State Government has prated loudly of "our heritage of Gaelic culture" and has protested its intent to save the Gaeltacht; Departmental officials and others of their kind have churned out reams of pidgin Irish; and the Gúm has established its Gaelic Grub Street. And year by year, hunger has driven the Gaeltacht people to America and England, and unemployment

has taught the native-speaking youth the patent truth that his tongue detracts from, rather than adds to, the only commodity he has to offer, his labour-power, if that commodity must be vended in the labour markets of the Gall. The native-speaking population of the Gaeltacht, therefore, has dwindled from 436,758 in 1911 to 299,249 in 1925, according to the Free State census returns published in 1932—a fall of 137,000 or nearly 33 per cent. of the whole in fourteen years, before the crisis had gripped Ireland.

In 1909 there was a Royal Commission on the congested districts (which correspond largely to the Gaeltacht). The Commission described the inhabitants of the area as “to a large extent the wrecks of past racial, religious, agrarian and social storms in Ireland, and of famine catastrophes;” and added that “in a bad year they are saved from extreme privation only by relief measures, and so constitute a serious financial danger to the nation; yet, if men be the real test of the wealth of a nation, they are a most valuable potential asset.” In 1925 there was a further official enquiry, this time by the Coimisiun na Gaeltachta, appointed by the Free State Government. This latter Commission reported that “the outstanding fact is that the Irish-speaking population is insecurely rooted in the land—the only stable basis of livelihood possessed by this population.” It pointed out that “the type of house on the holding, which forms the home, will play a very important part in the process of bringing about settled and improved social conditions. Over many districts in the Gaeltacht,

particularly in the West, the houses are very primitive, and the inhabitants, because of their own poverty and the poor financial circumstances of the Local Authorities, are unable to take advantage of the assistance given to house-builders generally." The same Commission showed that in Galway, in 1925, every thousand of inhabitants owned on an average only 434 acres of ploughed land; that they held only 96 horses, 1,638 sheep, 1,082 cattle, 4,230 poultry; and that the total value of their lands and houses was only £1,000 (£735, excluding buildings).

A final citation must be given. In 1930 there was a conference in the Mansion House, Dublin, on public health and social services. Mr. Michael Henaghan, superintendent of home assistance for Galway, submitted a statement to the conference which paints as grim a picture of hunger and misery as any description of the Gaeltacht people's lives during the last century.

"They eke out a miserable and weary existence," he said. "A person must visit their wretched cabins, sit down and talk familiarly with the people in order to realise the tragedy of their lives. Bare, empty houses, devoid of all domestic comforts, whether awake or sleeping, in summer and winter; pale-faced, sad-looking, ill-nourished children who seldom know the luxury to them of the taste of milk, butter or meat. This is no exaggerated picture of what prevails in many places in South Connemara along the sea-coast from Costello Bay in Lettermore District, where poverty and congestion are most acute and accentuated, in Rosmuch, in Lougha-

coneora, in Mynish, and all the way by the sea-coast, in different places as far as Cleggan.”<sup>13</sup>

It is clear, then, that all official inquiries demonstrate that the problem of the Gaeltacht is at root economic. The native speakers were driven across the Shannon and allowed to starve by imperial England; they are held across the Shannon and allowed to starve by capitalist Ireland. In this twentieth century, to propose cottage industries, hand-loom slavery, carrageen gathering and kelp-making as the solution of the problem is tragedy-comedy. The carrageen industry, for instance, is actually but a means of further exploiting the western islanders. The men who have taken up this means of keeping life in their body must leave home early in the morning to row with the women and children to far-away rocks, for the nearby rocks are quickly stripped. Peadar O'Maille has already exposed the carrageen farce.<sup>14</sup>

“It seems to me,” he wrote, “it is necessary to state that carrageen does *not* grow on every square inch of the districts known as the Gaeltacht. No, it does not grow in the fields or the bogs or on the hillsides. Carrageen is a seaweed, and grows only on rocks off the shore. For that reason only those whose land touches the coastline can avail themselves of it. Only about one-fourth of the shore produces carrageen. That means that carrageen is available only to one-fourth of the population whose land adjoins the sea, or *one-fortieth of the entire*

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in *An Phoblacht*, August 16, 1930.

<sup>14</sup> Peadar O'Maille: *Mayo News*, January 23, 1932.

population of the Gaeltacht. It may be asked, since carraheen is sold on the market for  $7\frac{1}{2}$ d. per quarter-pound package, why the two and a half per cent. of the population employed in gathering it make only £3 per family per year. The answer is simple. When they have it gathered and bleached and dried they sell it at from 1s. to 1s. 6d. per stone. Taking the maximum price which they can get for it—1s. 6d.—it means that the producer sells his article at the rate of 1s. 6d. a stone and the consumer pays for it at the rate of £1 15s. a stone. This difference between the buying price and the selling price represents a profit of over two thousand per cent.” Yet many families on the coast are so poor that they welcomed the industry as a Godsend, just as they were compelled to welcome the degradation of “tattie hoking” and the Scotch bothey.

The solution of the Gaeltacht problem is linked up with the problems of the other rural toilers and industrial workers. Capitalism cannot hand over the western ranches to the dispossessed remnants of the race; it cannot solve the crisis, which creates unemployment and compels emigration; it can give “assistance” only by burdening the toiling people with debt. The way out for the Gaeltacht people is the way out of the whole working masses of Ireland—the smashing of the imperialist-capitalist system in Ireland and the establishment of the Workers’ and Farmers’ Government of a free, united Ireland.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *THE WAY OUT*

**W**E have reviewed the agrarian crisis in Ireland and elsewhere. What, then, is the road out for the Irish rural toilers? How is the working farmer, the man owning, say, five to thirty acres, to free himself from the forces of the market over which he has no control; how is he to rid himself of the burdens of annuities and bank debts that are crushing him; how is he to gain any advantage from the progress of technique? Along what path must the dispossessed labourers travel if they are to escape eternal poverty and the condition of serfdom that has been depicted for Westmeath?

Two "ways out" of the crisis are advanced which would disturb in no way the existing social order. In actual fact, they are the same, save for the masks in which they come before the working people. The ranchers and capitalists of Ireland have improved Connolly's slogan. Taking as their motto, "Ireland apart from her bullocks means nothing to me," they assert that the country must remain a vast cattle-ranch. Thus will "prosperity" come and Ireland fulfil the destiny to which nature and British imperialism have called her. The second viewpoint, that of the petty bourgeoisie under the leadership of Fianna Fail, advocates peasant proprietorship. Its goal is the buying out of the estates: it paints the establishment of a peasantry as happy and



contented as Goldsmith's in an Ireland that will be a new :

*Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheer the labouring swain.*

There is the third and only real solution—that of the revolutionary working class of Ireland, which declares that there is no capitalist way out of the crisis created by capitalism; that the only way out is by breaking through the fabric of the existing system, by as radical an inroad on private property rights as was advocated by Fintan Lalor in 1848. We will examine each solution in turn.

Little space need be wasted in refuting the arguments of the profit-greedy bullock lords; any group of working farmers talking round the hob would have no doubts about one thing: that the interests of the ranchers are the interests neither of the working farmers nor of Ireland. Irish agriculture, as nationalist writers have often pointed out, is a crazy, lopsided thing, foisted and fostered by England in accordance with her dual policy—to retain Ireland as a war base and as a source of food supplies. The making of the ranches meant the near-extirpation of the Irish people in the latter half of the nineteenth century; the bullock and the sheep drove thousands of our tenant farmers to the emigrant ship; and to-day the bullock and the sheep lord it over the rich, warm lands of Meath and Kildare, while in the barren West dispossessed Ireland breaks its heart over stony potato patches. For decades now the bullock and the Irish peasant have faced each other in enmity, and

the victory of the one has meant that there was no room in Ireland for the other.

And latter-day events have shown how tightly Ireland's agrarian economy is bound up with British imperialism. Economically, the ranches are England's farmyards; politically, the ranchers are a vital division of England's garrison. Therefore, any movement that in any way "disturbs normal trading relations with Britain"—in other words, any movement for the liberation of Ireland from the Empire shackles—earns the fiercest hostility of the ranchers. The big graziers and their whole system not only hold the land of Ireland from the landless men and uneconomic holders, but they stand in the way of national freedom, they are an embodiment of the "robber rights and robber rule," and here, therefore, as at so many points, the age-old battle for nationhood links with the struggle for the social emancipation of the Irish toiling people.

Even on their own battleground the case of the ranchers can easily be demolished. It is true that up to recently, the handful of graziers were prospering, while the rest of the rural community were slipping further into debt and penury. But even if tillage farming had been completely destroyed, and the whole country was dotted only with the mansions of the lords of bullockdom and the occasional cabins of the few thousand herdsmen and shepherds required to maintain "prosperity," Ireland to-day would still be gripped by the world crisis. I have shown why Ireland was affected later than the grain-producing lands; and from the

statistics given of other countries the farcical nature of the Cumann na nGaedheal claim that the economic war<sup>1</sup> between England and the Free State is responsible for the crisis in Ireland becomes self-evident.

There is no economic blockade of Northern Ireland, of England itself, nor of the United States, yet these countries cannot sell their live stock. Like Ireland, they are affected by the same fundamental factors: the chronic choking of the world's markets, with the consequent intensified competition; and the industrial crisis, which has impoverished the urban workers and reduced tremendously their meat consumption. The "prosperity" of the graziers, therefore—damnable as it was to Ireland—would in any case have soon received short shrift at the hands of the world crisis.

The "way out" of the graziers and capitalist farmers is the way out of capitalism the world over. The squeezing out of the small farms—a process that to-day far outbalances the operations of the Land Commission—combined with an onslaught on the wages and living conditions of their labourers (or workers) is their only way to maintain their system and *their* prosperity. Along

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<sup>1</sup> Raging as I write—April, 1933. I have not dealt *in extenso* with British imperialism's economic blockade of Ireland, because of the quickly-altering details. Actually, however, the "war" is itself but an expression of the deepening crisis, as are all the tariff barriers being erected throughout the world. The effects of the blockade have been to sharpen and accelerate the crisis in Ireland.

the path of the capitalist farmers lies nothing but the increasing beggary of the Irish people.

Petty proprietorship inside the limits of the capitalist system can now be considered. There can be no question of the historical progress achieved by the hammer-blows dealt by the Land League struggle at the big estates. It was a step forward to force the division of these estates, even though the struggle was diverted from the revolutionary confiscation of the land to the buying out of the tenants' holdings. But peasant proprietorship came too late in Ireland—already the mechanised farms of America were on its heels. To-day, when scientific agriculture and the development of machinery make twenty-acre cultivation a method more and more antiquated, when all over the world the big, mechanised farm is squeezing out the peasant farm, it becomes a grim joke to advocate petty proprietorship as the panacea for Ireland. It is as nonsensical as to suggest that industry should give up its hydro-electricity, its turbines, its Diesel engines, its intricate, highly-developed machinery, and go back to the technique of the handloom.

Peasant proprietorship will not solve the problem in Ireland. Even were all the land divided into so-called economic holdings, what would it mean for the working farmer? No theoretical case need be proved here. The whole countryside provides the answer. Endless moil from dawn to twilight, slavery for his wife and children, and the shadow of the annuity-bailiff, the Bank agent and the rate-collector ever at his shoulder. He would be

shut out from all hopes of technical progress, for he would be unable to purchase machinery, and in any case most of the newer machines can be used effectively only on great tracts of land; his plight would almost be that of the Arran Islanders who see the Scotch drifters fish the waters into which their out-of-date curraghs dare not venture. And even if he managed to pluck a living from his holding, *what would happen to the next generation?* Let us say that each peasant proprietor has four children. Are all but the eldest to be driven from the country (and remember that there is now nowhere to go; the "wild geese" are returning even from Amerikay)? Or is the farm to be parcelled out afresh with each generation? If so, what becomes of the "*economic holding*"?

Finally, as has been stated, capitalism not only impoverishes and degrades the peasant farmer: it abolishes him as a class. The wiping out of petty proprietorship is an integral feature of bourgeois society. It is occurring not only in Germany, America, France and the other countries; it is a process that is developing swiftly in Ireland. The small farmer cannot live under capitalism and is being driven from the land, all Land Acts to the contrary notwithstanding. In 1911 there were 400,000 separate holdings of less than thirty acres in the area now forming the Free State. There were only 259,622 such holdings in 1931. Yet the petty-bourgeois scribes day after day pour out their cant about "the march back to the land"!

We maintain that this case against petty proprietorship

is unanswerable. Life has gone beyond this stage, a fact recognised increasingly by working farmers themselves, who can compare the harsh facts of their existence with the rosy idylls of middle-class Dublin writers. Peasant proprietorship is advocated now only by the capitalist theoreticians of Ireland, who urge the diffusion of property in land as a bulwark of the State—in other words a bulwark against revolution. That, together with the fact that the peasant proprietor can be, as has been shown, as ruthlessly exploited by capitalism as the industrial wage slave, is blatantly their motive; they urge, in defence, the land-hunger of the landless, and man's "innate craving for some bit of property he can call his own."

The naïveté of these gentlemen is amusing. The Irish peasant's historical hunger for a patch of land that would give him sustenance had behind it the very sound reason that his holding meant life to him; without it he starved or boarded the emigrant ship. No one hears of the land-hunger of a worker in Dublin, Cork or Limerick who is in a good job. Similarly, the "innate craving" for a bit of productive property is quite understandable in a social system where the effects of being without such property are demonstrated alarmingly by the plight of the agricultural labourers and the unemployed millions of the cities. But such a craving will persist only so long as the system which breeds it persists. And if the industrial workers will not permit the Free State Government to attempt the further building of the industrial system that has failed in every country of the world, still

less will the working farmers permit the extension of the agrarian system that has already failed in Ireland itself.

The case against peasant ownership can be closed with a quotation from James Connolly, written as far back as 1910, when the superiority of large-scale farming was already manifest :<sup>2</sup> " It is said we need not perhaps establish industry or try it, but we can at least establish peasant proprietary, and make every man the owner of his own farm, let every man live, if not under his own vine and fig tree, at least upon his own potato patch. . . . Have the advocates of peasant proprietary really considered the economic tendencies of the time, and the development of the mechanical arts in the agricultural world?

" The world is progressive, and peasant proprietary, which a hundred years ago might have been a boon, would now be powerless to save from ruin the agriculture of Ireland. The day of small farmers, as of small capitalists, is gone, and wherever they are still found they find it impossible to compete with the improved machinery and mammoth farms of America and Australia. Whereas each Irish farm is burdened with the support of its field workers for the entire 365 days in the year, the capitalist farmer of the States hires his " hands " by the hundred for harvesting operations and discharges them immediately they are completed, thus reducing to one-fourth the annual wages bill of his workers.

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<sup>2</sup> James Connolly: *The Harp*, 1910.

“How are our small farmers to compete with a state of matters like this, or like unto that revealed in the report of the American Social Science Association, even as far back as 1878. It tells how science and invention, after devoting so much time to industry, have turned their attention to agriculture, and as a result have effected almost a revolution in that branch of human activity. Ploughs which, driven by horses, plough more than five acres per day, or the extent of many an Irish farm, and steam ploughs which do more; machines for sowing seeds, with which a boy and horse can do three times the work of a man, and do it much better; reaping machines, with which a man with one or two pairs of horses can do the work of at least sixty men with reaping hooks; reaping machines which not only cut the harvest, but tie it as well, are now so common in England and America as to fail to attract attention, and we hear on good authority of machines which cut, thrash, winnow, and sack it, without the intervention of any other human hands than those of the engineer who tends the machine. In cutting the corn a man or boy, with a horse and machine, can do the work of twenty men, cutting an acre an hour.”

“All this, be it remembered, is only possible to the farmer who holds his thousands of acres. The first cost of any one of those machines would be enough to ruin the average small farmer in Ireland, and the result is that while he is painfully labouring on his farm his American competitor can bring in his harvest, send it thousands of miles by railroad, load it into ships, send



it across the Atlantic, and eventually sell it practically at our doors as cheap as, and cheaper than, our home produce.

“The competition of New Zealand beef and frozen mutton has already inflicted incalculable harm upon the Irish cattle trade, and within the last few months I have received private information of a contract entered into with the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company to transport butter from the huge cattle ranches of Australia to any port in Great Britain and Ireland at a price that spells ruin to the dairy farms of these countries. While, then, in order to avoid even the appearance of injustice, we may rigidly respect those ‘rights of property’ in land our peasant farmers have acquired by purchase, we must recognise that peasant proprietary in itself offers no hope of a free and unanxious life—not even to the peasant proprietor.”

It may be objected, however, that large-scale agriculture can be as disastrous to the poor farmers as petty-proprietorship. We have seen the example of America, where, despite the large-scale nature of farming and the great progress of mechanisation, agriculture is in a state of chaos, and thousands of farmers are bankrupt and poverty-stricken. Here the revolutionary workers step forward to point the fundamental lesson. It is this: there are two ways of establishing big agrarian concerns—the capitalist, and the socialist. America shows what the capitalist way means to the working farmers; to study the socialist way it is necessary to investigate agriculture in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the

country where the foundations of Socialism are being laid.

In the Soviet Union we have witnessed in the last fifteen years one of the most remarkable revolutions in agrarian technique that humanity has experienced. A country with the most backward and primitive agriculture has in a decade completely reorganised its rural life : not only have the scythe and the wooden plough drawn by a cow given place to the combine harvester and the tractor, but the social basis on which these changes have taken place differs from that operating in any other part of the world.

The November Revolution of 1917 laid the basis for the change. One of the earliest decrees of the Soviet Government confiscated the estates of the aristocracy, the Church and the big capitalist farmers, and gave the land to the peasantry. All taxes, rents and Church tithes were abolished, Bank and moneylenders' debts were wiped out, and the peasant farmers were thus freed from the burdens that had impoverished them for generations. Ownership of all land was vested in the State, mortgages were forbidden, in order to prevent exploitation by the capitalist elements still remaining in the Union; and the peasant, ensured security of tenure and permitted to till and dispose of the produce of his labour as he desired, was set on the road to a higher standard of living and was enabled to benefit by technical progress.

Herein lay the essential difference between agrarian development under capitalism and development under socialism. The capitalist State, as has been abundantly

shown, is not interested in developing agriculture in the interests of the working farmers. Technical progress takes place at the expense of the small farmers, and the State machine is used by the financial oligarchs who control it to lay increasing burdens on the country people. The Workers' State, on the other hand, which blazons in its Constitution the fundamental purpose of "abolishing the exploitation of man by man and of bringing about Communism, under which there will be neither division into classes nor State power," takes up energetically the task of rendering every assistance to agriculture, while at the same time ensuring that all progress benefits instead of hurting the working farmers.

Agriculture, like industry, made little progress in Soviet Russia in the years immediately following the Revolution. Civil war devastated the countryside. Britain, France and the other imperialist powers poured out millions of treasure to finance Denikin, Wrangel and other adventurers, whose counter-revolutionary armies laid waste vast areas of the country before the Red Army of the workers finally rolled them back. In these years the destruction of what little farming implements there were, the dearth of horses and cattle for draught purposes, and the thousands of acres which had gone out of cultivation brought about a serious retrogression in agriculture. It is estimated that in 1920, at the end of the civil war, the sown area had dropped to seventy per cent. of the pre-war period. Between 1916 and 1920 it had fallen from 86.4 million dessiatins [an acre = 0.37 dessiatins] to 60.5 million. With the corre-

sponding decline in the yield per dessiatin, agricultural production in 1920 was only 54.4 per cent. of pre-war production. Naturally, the town workers were seriously affected by the state of agriculture; the margin of the peasant farmer's produce for the market decreased rapidly. Imperialism had blockaded the first Workers' Republic. By 1921 famine was raging.

At the conclusion of the civil war, therefore, the chief task that confronted the victorious Soviet Government was the development of agriculture. This was the first condition for any industrial progress, for industry cannot develop without raw materials, without an ensured food supply for the town workers, or without an internal market for its products—that is, a peasantry able to purchase manufactured goods. Under Lenin's guidance, the Soviet Government commenced to lay the socialist foundation of its national economy, commencing first with agriculture. Every encouragement was given to the peasantry, and by 1926 it could be said that agriculture had been saved. The rapid development is illustrated by the following table:<sup>3</sup>

			<i>Production in</i>	<i>Production in</i>
			<i>Milliard Roubles</i>	<i>percentages</i>
1921-22	...	...	6.31	54.4
1922-23	...	...	8.54	73.6
1923-24	...	...	9.28	79.9
1924-25	...	...	9.75	84.0
1925-26	...	...	11.76	101.3

<sup>3</sup> Culled, like the statistics that follow, from various official publications of the Government of the U.S.S.R. I have

But hand in hand with this development, there was not only an increased prosperity for small and middle farmers; the wealthiest peasants and the kulaks—the hated gombeen men of the village, who worked their farms by hired labourers, and who were often, in addition, shopkeepers, moneylenders or publicans—had their position strengthened, with a corresponding hardening of their capitalist psychology. And while agriculture had been restored, it had not developed on the new social basis, in the sense that while in the towns the means of production were long since socialised, agriculture, in which the ownership of the land and implements was not centralised, was relatively much more backward. The Soviet Government's next step, therefore, was the socialisation of agriculture, and the first Five-Year Plan laid down that twenty per cent. of the peasant farms were to be collectivised by the end of the fifth year, while the State farms were greatly to extend their operations. Experimental farms were set up to demonstrate the greater efficiency and benefits of common effort, industry undertook the task of producing the tractors, combines and other machinery necessary, and in its first year the agricultural side of the Plan had to be redrafted—the goal set for five years hence had already been more than achieved in less than twelve months!

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also used the reports of the two Irish Labour delegations sent to the Soviet Union in 1926 and 1929, and an excellent first-hand description of the working of a collective farm contributed by T. R. fforde to the *Irish Workers' Voice* in August, 1932.

To form a collective farm, the peasant farmers of an area pool their land, draught animals and machinery. Each retains his cow, pigs, poultry and vegetable garden, but, as the principal means of production are held in common, and work can be planned better, the waste and often senseless drudgery of the small holding are abolished. Every assistance is given by the Government to the collectives. Technical experts and advice are at their disposal. Machine tractor stations loan power machinery at a nominal charge, and the farm is supplied with electric energy and is electric-lit throughout. The produce of the farms is disposed of in two ways. It can be handed over entirely at a fixed price to the Co-operative organisations, to be distributed by them to the consumers, or twenty per cent. can be sold direct (a method introduced in 1932 to induce the collectives to market more of their produce). The advantages of this latter modification are that larger supplies are available at lower prices due to the more direct path from the producer to the consumer, while the collectives are often able to receive more for their produce. Vegetables grown in the gardens may also be sold direct to the consumer, but no middleman is permitted to step into the transaction.

The produce having been raised in common it is sold in common, and the profits are then allotted. A sum of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. is paid to the Government as the collective's contribution to the upkeep of its class State organ; ten per cent. is laid aside for repairs and development; five per cent. is retained for the general cultural needs,

and after the fractional charge for the use of machinery has been met, the remainder is divided among the members of the farm. It was the result of the first year's working of the collective farms that won millions of individual peasants to the collective, for the advantages were obvious to all when the proceeds were shared. In the Ukraine, for instance, averages taken in 1932 showed that 14.3 working days were expended per hectare of cultivated land on the individual farms, and only 9.1 working days on the collectives.

Efficient working of the collective is ensured by the method of control. A general meeting of all members elects a committee of directors, one being placed in charge of the piggeries, another to look after the hot-houses, etc. The two leading workers are the chairman of the collective and the chairman of the village soviet or council. The former presides over meetings to decide upon the nature and rotation of crops, the allocation of work, the machinery needed, loans, etc. The latter presides over meetings to discuss building, lighting, drainage, educational work and the other administrative affairs of the town or village. In addition, the collectives are linked up with their national organisation, which publishes newspapers and books, has its own high schools, research institutes, and looks after the cultural welfare of the farmers generally. In Moscow, for instance, this organisation, the Colhozcentre, makes special arrangements for club facilities for collective workers who visit the Capital on holiday or for business

reasons. It is the Colhozcentre also which bears the strain of bad harvests in a particular farm or area.

The collective farm having these obvious advantages over the individual farm, it is not surprising that the Russian peasant has left the old ways trodden by his forefathers for generations, and has given up the primitiveness of petty proprietorship for the more efficient and historically progressive collective farming. By the end of 1932, collectivisation was practically completed throughout the U.S.S.R., despite the active opposition of the kulak gombeen men, who fought tooth and nail for the old system under which their exploitation could be carried on, but whose base has now been wiped out. Alongside the progress of collectivisation, the State farms have made great strides, increasing their tillage area, and establishing huge dairy and pig and cattle-rearing farms. The tables given here illustrate the rapid development of all branches of Soviet agriculture. In the next few years it is not intended to increase the acreage of arable land, but to raise the output by more intensive farming and the application of the latest agronomic science.

The tractor has proved the key to the transformation of Soviet agriculture, just as the Soviet Union has shown that only Socialism can make full use of the tractor. In the United States the number of tractors increased from 80,000 in 1919 to about a million in 1930. In the same decade the number of combine harvesters increased approximately eight times. The powerful development of the most modern technique—tractor power alone in-



creased by 20,000,000 h.p. — should have enabled American agriculture to raise its production correspondingly; it should have been possible to double the sowing area of the United States; actually, the cultivated area increased by only ten million acres, while production grew by only 13.5 per cent.

American experts assert that the tractor can be used effectively only on farms of at least five hundred acres; the Soviet State farms demonstrate that maximum tractor efficiency is possible only on farms of not less than 2,500 acres, a size that illustrates to the Irish working farmers the farcical nature of their ten-acre holdings. The factories of the U.S.S.R. are at present engaged in turning out thousands of tractors, combines, etc., for agriculture is crying out for them, and there is much leeway to be made up: in 1930 there were 158 stations supplying tractors to collective farms; in 1931 there were 1,228 stations, and in 1932 2,270; while the number of tractors allotted by the stations rose from 7,102 in 1930 to 76,122 in 1932.

It is necessary to recur to the political basis that made possible this development of agrarian technique in the Soviet Union. The conquest of State power by the workers and peasants in the Revolution of 1917 not only paved the way for agrarian technical advance, but ensured that this advance would not react against the peasant farmers.

In every capitalist country the consolidation of holdings and the introduction of machinery have, as their necessary complement, the driving of the countryfolk

from the land, and greater insecurity for the survivors. In the Workers' Republics the standards of life of the peasant farmers rise with each technical advance; and neither the transformation of the national economy as a whole from an agrarian to an industrial basis, nor the change over from petty proprietorship to large-scale agriculture necessitates the elimination of a single farmer. In the Soviet Union, also, the rural producers are freed from the nightmare of falling prices, occasioned by the crisis, for production is planned, prices are not determined by the stimulus of private profit, and are not controlled by the world market, but are conditioned by the interests of Socialist construction, of production as a whole.

Capitalism has cleft industry and agriculture into two entirely divided sections of production; socialism abolishes the cleavage, and agriculture throws off its backwardness and becomes itself an industry. "You divide the people into two hostile camps of clownish boors and emasculated dwarfs!" cried David Urquhart to Victorian capitalism.<sup>4</sup> Socialism has no such divisions for humanity; the physical deterioration of the town and the cultural stultification of the village are alike swept away.

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<sup>4</sup>David Urquhart: *Philosophy of Manufactures*. London, 1835.

## CHAPTER NINE

### UNDOING THE CONQUEST

AS the hundred and sixty millions of the former Tsarist "prison house of nations" have blazed the path to freedom for humanity in general, so the achievements of Soviet agriculture point the road for the working farmers of Ireland. And signs are that the Irish rural toilers are seeing more clearly the path they must tread: the countryside is in ferment, and, as Connolly has pointed out, there has always been an electric current between Ireland and liberation struggles abroad. "Just as '98 was an Irish expression of the tendencies embodied in the first French Revolution, as '48 throbbed in sympathy with the democratic and social upheavals on the Continent of Europe and England, so Fenianism was a responsive throb in the Irish heart to those pulsations in the heart of the European working class which elsewhere produced the International Working Men's Association."<sup>1</sup> To-day not only the crisis in Ireland and other capitalist countries, but the rise of the new social system across one-sixth of the globe, challenge the system of capitalism that is responsible for the chaos.

There can be no way out for the Irish working farmers under capitalism. It is true that Ireland has seen "bad times" before, that there were potato failures and hunger in 1825, '47, and '69, and that the country has always

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<sup>1</sup> James Connolly: *Ibid.*

made some sort of shift to get over these crises. But the "bad times" of to-day are fundamentally different from those of the nineteenth century. The famines of the last century, like the industrial slumps, took place when capitalism was expanding. Thousands of Irish peasant farmers were hunted off the land after the anti-Jacobin War and as a result of the "consolidations" that followed the great Hunger; but if they were driven from Ireland, at least there was some place to go. The new factories of England opened their jaws to receive them, for English capitalism was not able to destroy its native peasantry and handicraftsmen sufficiently quickly to provide the Briarean hands it required. Indeed, Engels states that "the rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command."<sup>2</sup>

Those were the days when dispossessed Ireland swarmed into the ghettos provided by the English lords of rent, interest and profit for their wage-slaves: a period referred to with typical anti-Irish spleen by Carlyle.<sup>3</sup> "The wild Milesian features," he complained, "looking false ingenuity, restlessness, unreason, misery and mockery, salute you on the highways and byways. The English coachman, as he whirls past, lashes the Milesian with his whip, curses him with his tongue: the Milesian is holding out his hat to beg. He is the sorest evil this

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Engels: *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, London, 1892.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Carlyle: *Chartism*.

country has to strive with. In his rags and laughing savagery, he is there to undertake all work that can be done by mere strength of hand and back—for wages that will purchase him potatoes. He needs only salt for condiment, he lodges to his mind in any pig-hutch or dog-hutch, roosts in outhouses, and wears a suit of tatters, the getting on and off of which is said to be a difficult operation, transacted only in festivals and the high tides of the calendar. The Saxon-man, if he cannot work on these terms, finds no work.”

Obviously, our evicted country people were welcomed by English capitalism, if the English workers were scarcely enamoured of them. Similarly, in the latter half of the century and up to, practically, the eve of the last war, there was a channel into which Ireland's blood could be drained. Newer Yankee capitalism had a use for it, and, whether carrying the hod in Chicago or driving spikes on the Union Pacific Railway, Irish exiles played a “noble” part in the creation of America's multi-millionaires. But, “other times, other ways”; even if the youth of the countryside were content to be driven from Ireland, the lands of bondage have to-day no use for them: have, in fact, put up immigration restriction against them. That way—the old and damned way—lies no succour.

Capitalism is no longer on the ascendant, but is in its final and dying stage, imperialism: “that phase of its development in which domination of monopolies and finance-capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired very great importance; in which

the division of the world among the big international trusts has begun; in which the partition of all the territories of the earth amongst the great capitalist powers has been completed.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the present crisis is different from all previous crises. Periodically—economists have been able to show a decennial cycle—markets have been choked with goods, as a result of the social anarchy of production inescapable under the present system, but always, after a certain period of distress, cessation of production and elimination of smaller enterprises, capitalism has been able to “rise from the dead ashes of its former self to higher things.” There was a new cycle of development, a new growth on a higher basis, for there were still market worlds to be won and wide tracts of the globe to be exploited.

To-day, finance-capital has drawn the productive systems of the whole world within its web; Africa, Asia and South America have been parcelled out between the great powers; the noose is tightening around the neck of imperialism. The general crisis of capitalism began during the great war, which itself demonstrated that a halt had been called to the progress of capitalism, and that British imperialism, for instance, could escape the noose only by placing it around the neck of a fellow-criminal, German imperialism. The present crisis has developed on top of the general crisis, interlocking with and intensifying it. Equally, the general crisis has given the cyclical crisis a depth and virulence unknown in any

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<sup>4</sup> V. I. Lenin: *Imperialism: The Last Stage of Capitalism*, London, 1926.

previous period. The whole capitalist system is thereby undermined.

Bourgeois politicians, economists and "thinkers" may prattle about "turning the corner" and "gleams in the clouds," but that the imperialists as a whole realise that their race is run may be seen from the measures they are taking to prolong the life of their system: the deliberate destruction of productive forces in industry and agriculture; inflation; a wild tariff war; greater demands for loot from the colonies and subjugated nations; an attack on the wages, working conditions and social services gained by the workers after generations of struggle; active preparation for war amongst themselves, and, above all, for armed intervention against the Soviet Union, the land in which their rulership has been overthrown.

Seeing the crisis in Irish agriculture correctly as part of the world crisis-mosaic, it becomes evident that for Ireland, as well as the other capitalist countries, the only way out for the working people is the overthrow of the social order that has brought the world to this impasse. No tinkering with wheat schemes, home milling, cattle subsidies or tariffs will solve the problem, for they avoid the fundamentals. Social anarchy in production continues, goods are still produced not for use, not because they are necessary, but in order to gain profit for individuals. A few sweatshop owners or big tillage farmers may benefit for a while, out of the pockets of the workers and working farmers, but the ultimate end is inescapable.

There is only one way out. The fundamental contra-

diction between social production and individual appropriation must be abolished. This is the Gordian knot which modern society must cut. The "solution can only consist in the practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, appropriation and exchange with the socialised character of the means of production."<sup>5</sup> In other words, in the solution propounded by James Connolly when he founded his Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896: the forcible overthrow of capitalist-imperialism and the establishment of the Irish Workers' and Working Farmers' Republic.

The stranglehold of imperialism and capitalism having been broken, the planned national economy of the Workers' Republic will replace the anarchy of production that characterises the two Statelets in Ireland to-day. Factory and farm will combine for the common good. As the industrial worker will be free from wage exploitation, the working farmer will be freed from all annuity, bank and mortgage robberies, and producing exactly what is required, will not be dominated by that monster, the "market." The bullock will be evicted and exiled, in numbers sufficient to provide the country with meat, to the non-arable lands to which he formerly banished our countryfolk. The ranches will be taken over and restored to the submerged Ireland from whom they were robbed. Technical advance will be at the disposal of the

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Engels: *Socialism: From Utopia to Science*, London, 1896.



working farmers, and "pull devil, pull baker" having been wiped out nationally, they will realise the advantage of collective effort. At the same time, there will be no interference with the small and middle farmers of the older generation who are unable to see the benefits of co-operation; they will be ensured security of tenure, as long as they do not exploit their fellow-man.

This will be the free Ireland for which James Connolly worked and died. National subjugation, imperial tribute, "social cannibalism," slum landlords and slum conditions, bullock herdsman who are unable to afford meat, wheat-growers in want for bread—all the lunacies of capitalist-imperialism will disappear.

But how? As the United Irishmen's manifesto of 1793 said: "Were the hand of Locke to hold from heaven a scheme of government most perfectly adapted to the nature and capabilities of the Irish nation, it would drop to the ground a mere sounding scroll were there no other means of giving it effect than its intrinsic excellence." How is this great social change to be effected? What forces can carry it through?

Our survey of the agrarian struggle has shown that Ireland's history has been made by the clash of classes, that it is this clash that is the dynamic of society. Which class or classes, then, can destroy capitalist-imperialism, and build the free Ireland? The class of bankers, brewers, railway owners? The very suggestion is ludicrous. The ranchers? Their political standpoint has already been outlined. They also can be dismissed. The smaller manufacturers who are not tied to Britain? No,

for they, too, stand by "private property rights"—i.e., their Utopia would be an Ireland free from the exploitation of Britain that there might be the more to exploit themselves.

Connolly has said of them: "While shouting louder than all others their untiring devotion to the cause of freedom, they, as a class, unceasingly strove to divert the public mind upon the lines of constitutional agitation for such reforms as might remove irritating and unnecessary officialism while leaving untouched the basis of national and economic subjection."<sup>6</sup> Because of this, the lower middle class can lead the toiling people of Ireland neither to national nor social liberation.

Are the working farmers themselves, then, the force that can achieve freedom? This question requires detailed examination. It is irrefragably true that the country people have provided the main man-power for all previous struggles in Ireland; that as a fighting force they have no superiors in the world; and that they have a great part to play in the present-day fight. But it is equally true that the experience of all countries, including Ireland, demonstrates that the peasant farmers can never win to the leadership of the other classes struggling against oppression: always they fight under the banner of another class.

Glance back at our national history: always has the middle class provided the theoretical direction of the revolutionary efforts. In 1798 the peasantry alone took

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<sup>6</sup> James Connolly: *Ibid.*

the field as a class in the South—and they scoured the country seeking “gentlemen” to lead them. Consequently, their heroic efforts and selfless devotion were dissipated by chiefs such as Bagenal Harvey. The story of 'Forty-eight is a record of the treachery of the Irish bourgeoisie and the incompetency of the petty bourgeoisie, whose class position is evidenced in a classic letter from Gavan Duffy to William Smith O'Brien:<sup>7</sup>

“Mitchell means (I am told by Dillon) to declare for a Republic in his paper to-morrow,” he wrote. “There will be an outburst sooner or later, be sure of that. But unless you provide against it, it will be a mere democratic one, which the English Government will **extinguish** in blood. Or if, by a miracle, it succeeds, it will mean death and exile to the middle as well as the upper classes. As Ireland lies under my eye now I see but one safety for her—a union of the Old and Young Irishmen, *an arraying of the middle class in front of the millions*, and a peaceful revolution, attained by watching and seizing our opportunity. By peaceful, I mean without unnecessary or anarchical bloodshed. It may be won without a shot being fired. But trust me, if there is no such junction, and if things are let to take the course they are tending towards, we will see the life of the country trampled out under the feet of English soldiers, suppressing a peasant insurrection; or you and I will meet on a Jacobin scaffold, ordered for execution as enemies of some new Marat or Robespierre, Mr. James Lalor or Mr. Somebody Else. It is the fixed and

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<sup>7</sup> *Cahirmoyle Correspondence.*

inevitable course of revolutions when the strength of the middle classes is permitted to waste in inaction."

Similarly, in the Land League days Parnell and his fellow-capitalist politicians took control of a struggle that was initiated by the tenant farmers themselves and diverted it skilfully from revolutionary channels. Davitt's individual subordination to Parnell personified the relations between the classes represented by the two men. Even for Davitt—immeasurably the greater and clearer-brained of the twain—there could be questioning of the inferior rôle of his class. And, to come down to our own day, we have seen, in an earlier chapter, how the peasant farmers were so in political bondage to the Sinn Féin middle class in the 'Tan war that country Volunteers could be used against their brothers in the interests of landlordism.

This inability of the agricultural population to forge its own political leadership is due to readily apparent reasons. Farmers, by the very nature of their means of livelihood, are not grouped together as is the urban population. They have not precisely similar problems as have practically, say, the workers of a big factory who are receiving the same scale of wages. They are more individualistic. They are cut off from their fellows in other areas, and find it impossible to meet and thrash out the questions affecting them. A local leadership for local struggles can easily be thrown up, as has been done in every agrarian battle, but a national political party, representing the interests of the country people alone, is impossible.

Bukharin, showing how "it is important to learn what are the traits that must be present in a class in order to enable it to accomplish a transformation of society—to shunt society from the capitalist track to the socialist track," has outlined this very clearly. He tables the required "traits" as follows:<sup>8</sup>

- (1) Such a class must be one that has been *economically exploited and politically oppressed* under capitalist society; otherwise, the class will have no reason for resisting the capitalist order; it will not rebel under any circumstances.
- (2) It follows—to put the matter crudely—that it must be a *poor* class, for otherwise it will have no opportunity to feel its poverty as compared with the wealth of other classes.
- (3) It must be a *producing* class; for, if it is not, i.e., if it has no immediate share in the production of values, it may at best destroy, being unable to produce, create, organise.
- (4) It must be a class that is *not bound by private* property, for a class whose material existence is based on private property will naturally be inclined to increase its property, not to abolish private property, as is demanded by Communism.
- (5) This class must be one which has been *welded together* by the conditions of its existence and its *common* labour, its members working side by side. Otherwise

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<sup>8</sup> N. Bukharin: *Historical Materialism*, New York, 1926.

it will be incapable of desiring—not to mention constructing—a society that is the embodiment of the social labour of comrades. Furthermore, such a class could not wage an *organised* struggle or create a new state power.

Bukharin gives a table in which the presence or absence of these characteristics is indicated by a plus or a minus sign.

CLASS PROPERTIES	LUMPEN- PEASANTRY PROLETARIAT PROLETARIAT (Loafers)		
(1) Economic exploitation	+	—	+
(2) Political oppression ...	+	+	+
(3) Poverty ... ..	+	+	+
(4) Productivity ... ..	+	—	+
(5) Freedom from private property ... ..	—	+	+
(6) Condition of union in production and com- mon labour ... ..	—	—	+

This table may be rather schematic and abstract for a country which has yet to complete its national revolution, for it does not bring out the revolutionary potentialities of the peasant farmers. These potentialities and the rôle of the working farmers are outlined more correctly for Ireland in the paragraph on the strategy of the revolution from the manifesto issued by the inaugural congress of the Communist Party of Ireland:

“Between the national and social liberation of the toiling masses of Ireland there is no contradiction, as is

usually claimed by bourgeois politicians. On the contrary, it is just because the chief task of the proletariat is socialism that it is capable of carrying the national fight with England to a finish. The Irish working class will carry on the national independence struggle to the end, attaching to itself the mass of peasant farmers, so as to crush the power of resistance of the British imperialists and neutralise the unreliability of the Irish capitalist class. The Irish proletariat will bring about a socialist revolution, attaching to itself the masses of **semi-proletarians** in the population, so as to break the power of resistance of the capitalists and overcome the waverings of the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. At the head of the peasants for an independent Ireland, at the head of all the toilers and exploited for a Workers' and Farmers' Republic, for the dictatorship of the proletariat—such is the historic task given to the Irish working class by the whole of the present alignment of class forces in Ireland and by the position of the Irish national independence movement as an integral part of the international revolution."

Here is shown clearly that the working farmers have a great part to play in the merging struggle, but that it is the working class and its Party that must lead. The peasant farmers cannot form their own class party. Even the big farmers and graziers, who have attempted several times to form Farmers' Parties, have invariably given up the ghost after a while and have merged into the parties of their natural allies, the capitalists. As for the rancher, so for the working farmer. He, too, as the

manifesto quoted shows, has a natural comrade—the industrial worker. Both capitalist and rancher are exploiters; both worker and working farmer are exploited, and have a common enemy and a common cause.

And the industrial proletariat has no such difficulties of class organisation as have the working farmers. Capitalism, in creating a great town working class, digs its own grave: the workers are brought together in thousands: they learn class solidarity and discipline: they see themselves directly counterposed to their exploiters and so build their economic trade unions and, developing their own class theory, their political party.

And, “of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie to-day, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product. . . . All the preceding classes that got the upper hand, sought to fortify their already acquired status by subjecting society at large to their conditions of appropriation. The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property. All previous movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent



movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.”<sup>9</sup>

It is the working class, then, directed by its steeled vanguard, the Communist Party of Ireland, and allied firmly with the working farmers, that is the leadership for the present struggle in Ireland. With a chain of Working Farmer Committees up and down the country to act as the fighting “trade unions” of the small farmers, and throwing behind the revolutionary party of the working class the whole weight of their political strength, the working farmers can play a part in the present struggle worthy of their traditions. The revolutionary struggle of the toiling people of Ireland will not only undo the conquest and make an end to all economic and political subjugation; it will set the seal on the age-old battle for Ireland’s national liberation, on the heroism of the generations from Wolfe Tone to Liam Mellows. So Fintan Lalor’s visioning will take flesh and blood :

*“Mankind will yet be masters of the earth. Train your hands, and your sons’ hands, gentlemen of the earth, for you and they will yet have to use them.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: *Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

## APPENDIX

*[From the speech delivered by Stalin, in January, 1933, at a meeting of the joint plenum of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.]*

THE Five-Year Plan in the field of agriculture is a Five-Year Plan of collectivisation. What did the Party base itself on in carrying out collectivisation?

The Party based itself upon the fact that the consolidation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the building of the socialist society required, in addition to industrialisation, a change from small individual peasant farming to large-scale collective farming supplied with tractors and modern agricultural machinery, as the only sound foundation of the Soviet power in the village.

The Party based itself upon the fact that without collectivisation it was impossible to lead our country along the highway of the construction of the economic foundation of socialism, impossible to deliver the many millions of the toiling peasantry from poverty and ignorance.

Lenin said that: "*There is no way out of poverty for small holdings.*" (Lenin, third edition, Vol. 24, Page 540.)

Lenin said that: "*If we continue to sit as of old in small holdings, even as free citizens on free land, we will be threatened with inevitable destruction just the same.*" (Lenin, Vol. 20, Page 417.)

Lenin said that: "*Only with the aid of joint, artel, co-operative labour can we extricate ourselves from the impasse into which we have been driven by the imperialist war.*" (Lenin, third edition, Vol. 24, Page 540.)

"*It is necessary to go over to joint cultivation of big model farms; without this it will be impossible to get out*

*of the state of ruin, out of the absolutely desperate situation in which Russia finds itself.*" (Lenin, Vol. 20, Page 418.)

On the basis of the above, Lenin came to the following fundamental conclusion: *"Only if we succeed in proving to the peasants in actual fact the advantages of social, collective, co-operative, artel cultivation of the land, only if we succeed in helping the peasant with the aid of co-operative, artel farming, only then will the working class, which holds the state power in its hands, really prove to the peasant that it is right, will it really win over firmly and effectively the many millions of the peasantry."* (Lenin, Vol. 24, Page 579-580.)

It was upon these theses of Lenin that the Party based itself in carrying out the programme of collectivisation of agriculture, the programme of the Five-Year Plan in the field of agriculture.

In this connection the task of the Five-Year Plan in agriculture consisted in uniting the scattered and small individual peasant farms, which were unable to employ tractors and modern agricultural machinery, into big collective farms equipped with all the modern implements of highly developed agriculture, and in covering the free lands with model state farms, with Soviet farms.

The task of the Five-Year Plan in agriculture consisted in converting the U.S.S.R. from a small-peasant and backward land into a land on the basis of collective labour and yielding the maximum of marketable commodities.

What has the Party achieved in carrying out the programme of the Five-Year Plan in four years in the field of agriculture? Has it fulfilled its programme, or has it failed?

The Party has achieved this—that in the course of three years it has succeeded in organising over 200,000 collective farms and about 5,000 state farms devoted primarily to grain and cattle breeding, while securing at the same time an extension of the cultivated area by 21 million hectares in four years.

The Party has achieved this—that the collective farms now unite over 60 per cent. of the peasant holdings and embrace over 70 per cent. of all the peasant farms, which means that the Five-Year Plan has been *exceeded three times*.

The Party has achieved this—that instead of 500-600 million poods of marketable grain collected annually during the prevalence of individual farming, it is now able to collect 1,200-1,400 million poods of grain annually.

The Party has achieved this—that the kulaks as a class have been crushed, though not beaten completely, that the toiling peasantry has been freed from kulak bondage and exploitation, and that the Soviet power has been placed on a sound economic foundation in the village, a foundation of collective farming.

The Party has achieved this—that the U.S.S.R. has been transformed from a land of small peasant holdings into a land of the biggest farming in the world.

Such on the whole are the results of the Five-Year Plan in four years in the field of agriculture.

Now judge for yourselves: after all this, how much all the prattle of the bourgeois press about the “failure” of collectivisation, about the “failure” of the Five-Year Plan in the field of agriculture, is worth?

And what is the condition of agriculture in the *capitalist* countries, which are now in the grip of the most severe agricultural crisis?

Here are some well-known official data.

The cultivated areas in the main grain-producing countries have been reduced by eight to ten per cent. The acreage under cotton in the U.S.A. has been reduced by 15 per cent., the area under sugar cane in Germany and Czechoslovakia by 22 to 30 per cent., the area under flax in Lithuania and Latvia by 25 to 30 per cent.

According to the returns of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the value of the gross output of agriculture in the U.S.A. *dropped* from \$11,000,000,000 in 1929, to

\$5,000,000,000 in 1932, that is, more than 50 per cent. The value of the gross output of grain has *decreased* from \$1,288,000,000 in 1929 to \$391,000,000 in 1932, that is, more than 68 per cent. As regards cotton, the *reduction* was from \$1,389,000,000 in 1929 to \$397,000,000 in 1932, more than 70 per cent.

Do not all these facts speak for the superiority of the Soviet system of agriculture over the capitalist system? Do not all of these facts testify that the collective farms represent a more virile form of farming than the individual and capitalist farms?

It is said that the collective and state farms are not entirely profitable, that they swallow up a great amount of money, that it is quite unreasonable to run such enterprises, that it would be more advisable to dissolve them, leaving only those which work at a profit. But this can be said only by people who have no understanding whatsoever of the problems of national economy, of the problems of economics.

More than half of the textile mills were unprofitable several years ago. A section of our comrades then urged the closing of these mills. What would have happened to us had we listened to them? We would have committed the greatest crime against the country, against the working class, for we would have ruined our rising industry.

What did we do then? We waited for over a year until finally the whole of the textile industry was made profitable.

And now our auto plant in Gorki? It too is as yet unprofitable. Will you not order us to close it down? Or our iron and steel industry which is as yet unprofitable, too? Should we not close it down, comrades?

If we regard profitableness from this point of view, we would have to develop to the utmost only a few industries which yield the highest profit—for instance, the confectionery, flour milling, perfume, hosiery, and toy industries, and so on. Of course, I am not opposed to the development

of these industries. On the contrary, they must be developed, for they, too, are required by the population. But first, they cannot be developed without equipment and fuel which are produced by heavy industry. Second, we cannot base industrialisation upon them. That is the point, comrades.

Profitableness must not be regarded from a trader's standpoint, from the standpoint of the given moment. Profitableness must be taken from the standpoint of the whole of the national economy and over a period of several years. Only such a standpoint may be called a truly Leninist, truly Marxian standpoint. And this standpoint must be taken not only with regard to industry, but, in an even greater measure, with regard to the collective and state farms.

Just think of it: in the course of some three years we have created more than 200,000 collective farms and about 5,000 state farms; that is, we have created entirely new and large enterprises which are of as much importance to agriculture as the factories and mills are to industry.

Name a country which has succeeded in creating in three years not 205,000 new great enterprises, but even 25,000 such enterprises. You cannot name it, for no such country exists or has existed. Yet we have created 205,000 such enterprises in agriculture.

Still, there appear to be people in the world who demand that these enterprises should immediately become profitable and, unless they become so, to destroy and dissolve them. Is it not clear that these queer people envy the laurels of *Herostratus* and cannot sleep at night worrying over them?

Speaking of the unprofitableness of collective and state farms, I do not at all mean to say that all of them are unprofitable. Nothing of the sort! It is known to everybody that even now there are a large number of highly profitable collective and state farms. We have thousands of collective farms and scores of state farms which are already highly profitable.

These collective and state farms are the pride of our Party, the pride of the Soviet power. Of course, they are not the same everywhere. There are among the state and collective farms old ones, new ones, and very young ones. These are still weak economic organisms which have not yet taken on full shape. They are going through approximately the same period in their organisational development as our factories and mills did in 1920 and 1921.

Of course, they cannot yet in the majority be profitable. But that they will become profitable in two, three years, just as our factories and mills became profitable after 1921, there can be no doubt. To refuse them aid and assistance on the basis that not all of them are profitable at the given moment is to commit the greatest crime against the working class and peasantry. Only the enemies of the people and counter-revolutionists can raise the question of the uselessness of the collective and state farms!

In realising the Five-Year Plan in agriculture, the Party carried out collectivisation at an accelerated tempo. Was the Party right in pursuing the policy of an accelerated tempo of collectivisation? Yes, it was undoubtedly right, even although things have not been accomplished here without some people being carried away by their enthusiasm.

In pursuing the policy of the liquidation of the kulaks as a class and extermination of the kulak nests, the Party could not stop halfway, it had to bring this to an end. This is first. Second, while possessing tractors and farm machinery on the one hand and taking advantage of the absence of private property in land (nationalisation of the land!) on the other, the Party had every opportunity to force the collectivisation of agriculture. And it did really achieve in this field the greatest success, for the programme of the Five-Year Plan of collectivisation has been exceeded three times.

Does this mean that we must pursue the policy of a forced tempo of collectivisation during the period of the Second

Five-Year Plan? No, it does not. The point is that we have already essentially completed the collectivisation of the basis regions of the U.S.S.R. Hence, we have done more in this field than might have been expected. And we have not only essentially completed collectivisation. We have achieved this—that in the consciousness of the enormous majority of the peasantry, the collective farms have become the most acceptable form of farming.

This is a tremendous achievement, comrades. Now the question is not whether collective farms are to be or not to be. This question has already been decided in the affirmative. The collective farms are consolidated, and the road to the old individual system of farming has been definitely closed. Now the task consists of strengthening the collective farms organisationally, of driving out of them the wrecking elements, of selecting really good and tried Bolshevik cadres for the collective farms and of making them into really Bolshevik farms. This is the main thing now.

That is the position in regard to the Five-Year Plan in four years in the sphere of agriculture.

One of the principal gains of the Five-Year Plan in four years is that we have abolished unemployment and have relieved the workers of the U.S.S.R. from its horrors.

The same thing must be said in regard to the peasantry. They, too, have forgotten about the differentiation of the peasantry as between kulaks and poor peasantry; they have forgotten about the exploitation of the peasants by the kulaks; about the ruin which, every year, caused hundreds of thousands, and millions, of the poor peasants to go begging on the road. Three or four years ago, the poor stratum of our peasantry represented not less than 30 per cent. of the total peasant population. These numbered more than 10,000,000. Before that time, before the October Revolu-



tion, the poor stratum represented not less than 60 per cent. of the peasant population. Who are the poor peasants? They are those who usually lacked either seeds, or horses, or implements, or all of these, for the purpose of carrying on their husbandry. The poor peasants are those who lived in a state of semi-starvation and, as a rule, were in bondage to the kulaks, and in the old days, both to the kulaks and the landlords. Not so long ago, about one and a half million, and sometimes two million poor peasants used to go seeking work every year in the South—in the North Caucasus and the Ukraine, to hire themselves to the kulaks, and still earlier—to the kulaks, and landlords. Still larger numbers used to come every year to the factory gates and fill the ranks of the unemployed. And it was not only the poor peasants who found themselves in this unenviable position. A good half of the middle peasants found themselves in the same state of poverty and privation as the poor peasants. The peasants have managed to forget about all this now.

What has the Five-Year Plan in four years given to the poor peasants and to the lower stratum of the middle peasants? It has undermined and smashed the kulaks as a class, and has liberated the poor peasants, and a good half of the middle peasants, from bondage to the kulaks. It has brought them into the collective farms and put them in a firm position. By this it has destroyed the possibility of the differentiation of the peasantry into exploiter-kulaks and exploited poor peasants. It has put the poor and the lower stratum of the middle peasants who are in the collective farms in a position of security, and by that, has put a stop to the process of ruin and impoverishment of the peasantry. Now there are no longer cases in our country of millions of peasants leaving their homes annually to seek work in remote districts. In order to get the peasant to go to work outside of his own collective farm it is now necessary to sign a contract with the collective farm and in addition to pay the collective farmer his railway expenses. Now

there are no more cases of hundreds of thousands, and millions, of peasants being ruined and forced to hang about the factory gates. That is what used to happen long ago. Now the peasant is in a state of security, he is a member of a collective farm, which owns tractors, agricultural machinery, a seed fund, a reserve fund, etc., etc.

That is what the Five-Year Plan has given to the poor peasants and to the lower stratum of the middle peasants.



**TABLE I.—LAND PURCHASE, IRISH FREE STATE.**

Amount of half-yearly instalments of Land Purchase Annuities which accrued due during each year ended March 31, also the total amount of such annuities and arrears from previous years collectible and the amount thereof collected in each year.\*

Acts	1925-6	1926-7	1927-8	1928-9	1929-30	1930-31
<b>Land Acts:</b>	£	£	£	£	£	£
1881-1889 .. ..	207,212	206,788	206,119	205,856	205,371	204,949
1891-1896 .. ..	271,197	267,470	264,348	259,546	250,638	241,539
1903 .. ..	2,168,375	2,185,382	2,198,999	2,208,389	2,214,623	2,217,486
1909 .. ..	266,273	276,582	293,229	317,863	337,528	357,963
1923-9 .. ..	16,216	32,152	44,908	93,368	135,730	196,147
Labourers Acts, 1906-14 ..	123,254	123,252	123,252	123,240	123,226	123,219
<b>Total accrued due in year..</b>	<b>3,052,527</b>	<b>3,091,626</b>	<b>3,130,855</b>	<b>3,208,262</b>	<b>3,267,116</b>	<b>3,341,303</b>
<b>Add arrears from previous years .. ..</b>	<b>413,012</b>	<b>435,568</b>	<b>387,722</b>	<b>424,901</b>	<b>413,498</b>	<b>383,929</b>
<b>Total collectible in year ..</b>	<b>3,465,539</b>	<b>3,527,194</b>	<b>3,518,577</b>	<b>3,633,163</b>	<b>3,680,614</b>	<b>3,725,232</b>
<b>Amount collected in year..</b>	<b>3,029,971</b>	<b>3,139,472</b>	<b>3,093,676</b>	<b>3,219,665</b>	<b>3,296,686</b>	<b>3,309,106</b>

In addition to the collection of land purchase annuities, the Land Commission collect interest in lieu of rent and rent and interest in respect of estates purchased under the Irish Land Acts, 1903-9, and payment in lieu of rent and interest in respect of tenanted and untenanted land respectively coming under the purchase provisions of the Land Acts, 1923-9. During the year ended March 31, 1931, the amount collected in respect of interest in lieu of rent and rent and interest under the 1903-9 Act was £136,482. During the year ended January 31, 1931, the amount collected in respect of payment in lieu of rent under the 1923-9 Acts was £765,841, and during the year ended March 31, 1931, the income received in respect of rent and interest from untenanted land acquired by the Land Commission under the Land Acts, 1923-9, amounted to £168,344.

\*Saorstát Statistical Abstract, 1932



**TABLE II.—LAND PURCHASE, NORTHERN IRELAND.**

Under the Government of Ireland Act which partitioned Ireland and set up the puppet Northern statelet, it was agreed that the Six-County Government collect and retain all annuities in respect of agreements made before December 23, 1920. The following table shows the amounts collected from this source for each year ended March 31, grouped according to the Act under which the advances were made.

Act.	1928-29	1929-30	1930-31
Landlord and Tenant Act, 1870 ...	£ 2,803	£ 2,799	£ 2,750
Land Purchase Acts, 1881-88 ...	81,080	81,250	81,175
" " " 1891-96 ...	61,801	59,566	57,300
" " " 1903 ...	456,447	457,505	459,011
" " " 1909 ...	35,035	35,071	35,084
Labourers' Acts, 1906-14 ...	28,288	28,288	28,288
Totals ...	665,454	664,479	663,608

The arrears outstanding on March 31, 1922, amounted to £13,400, and on March 31, 1931, to £10,364.

Land purchase annuities in repayment of advances made in respect of agreements entered into after December 23, 1920, and annuities set up under the Northern Ireland Land Purchase Act, 1925, although collected by the Government of Northern Ireland and paid into Northern Ireland's Exchequer, do not benefit her revenue, as a deduction equivalent to the amount collectible is made from the residuary share of reserved taxes.



**TABLE III.—AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS.**

Number of males and females twelve years and over, including temporarily unemployed, engaged in agricultural occupations in 1926.\*

**IRISH FREE STATE.**

Occupation.	Males.	Females.
Farmers ... ..	220,442	48,488
Farmers' sons and daughters assisting on home farm...	152,897	53,485
Farmers' other relatives assisting on home farm ...	39,424	18,289
Farm managers ... ..	2,349	78
Farm foremen ... ..	578	85
Agricultural labourers:		
Not living in ... ..	89,117	846
Living in ... ..	36,044	402
Gardeners and nurserymen ... ..	6,578	168
Gardeners' labourers ... ..	1,395	16
Woodmen ... ..	539	—
Other agricultural occupations ... ..	809	100
Total paid agricultural employees ... ..	137,409	1,695
Total farmers and family workers ... ..	412,763	120,262
Totals ... ..	550,172	121,957

**NORTHERN IRELAND.**

Occupation.	Persons.	Males.	Females.
Farmers ... ..	68,156	59,510	8,646
Farmers' relatives assisting in the work of the farm ... ..	42,767	36,357	6,410
Agricultural labourers:			
In charge of cattle ... ..	1,353	1,187	166
" " horses ... ..	1,468	1,467	1
Not otherwise distinguished ... ..	31,975	31,363	612
Gardeners and their labourers ... ..	1,028	997	31
Others ... ..	767	663	104
Totals ... ..	147,514	131,544	15,970

\*Both these tables are culled from the census taken by the two Statelets in 1926. The total population of the Free State was then 2,971,992 and of the Six County area 1,256,561.





**TABLE IX.—FALL IN AGRICULTURAL PRICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND.\***

**Prices of Agricultural Produce.**

The following table shows the average prices obtained for certain of the principal crops grown on Northern Ireland farms during the agricultural years ended September 30, 1927, to 1931

Description	Unit	Average Price				
		1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
		£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d
White Oats	per cwt	0 7 2	0 9 0	0 8 2	0 6 7	0 5 11
Potatoes	"	0 3 8	0 4 1	0 2 9½	0 2 3	0 4 1½
Hay—1st & 2nd year's	per ton	3 3 4	3 14 10	4 14 0	3 17 0	3 3 10½
" " Meadow	"	2 5 9	2 14 8	3 19 1	2 17 3	2 6 4
Grass Seed —						
Perennial	per cwt	1 7 1	0 19 5	0 13 7	0 14 0	0 12 10
Italian	"	0 17 0	1 3 9	0 19 0	1 5 9	0 13 8
Mixed	"	0 17 2	0 17 6	0 13 5	0 15 5	0 9 11½
Flax	"	3 13 8	6 2 9	4 12 11	3 12 7	2 0 0½

**Prices of Live Stock Products.**

The average prices of the principal live stock products produced in Northern Ireland during the calendar years 1927 to 1931 are shown below.

Description	Unit	Average Price				
		1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
		£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d	£ s d
Meat Provisions, etc.						
Beef (live)	per cwt	2 5 3	2 7 5	2 4 10	2 5 9	2 1 4
" (dead)	"	3 19 2	4 3 0	3 18 5½	4 0 0½	3 12 4
Eggs —						
Hen	per lb.	0 0 10½	0 0 10½	0 0 11	0 0 8½	0 0 7½
Duck	per 120	0 12 6	0 11 10½	0 13 0	0 10 9½	0 9 3
Wool	per lb.	0 0 10½	0 0 11½	0 0 10½	0 0 5½	0 0 3½
Pork	per cwt	3 14 0	3 15 8	4 6 6	3 17 2	2 15 6
Farmers' Butter	per lb.	0 1 5	0 1 5½	0 1 6	0 1 3½	0 1 0½
Poultry —						
Hens	per head	0 2 6	0 2 5	0 2 3	0 2 3	0 2 2
Chickens	"	0 3 6	0 3 4	0 3 2	0 2 11	0 3 0
Ducks	"	0 2 8	0 2 9	0 2 3	0 2 4	0 2 1

\*Both the tables on this page are from the *Ulster Year Book*, 1932.



**TABLE X.—SOVIET AGRICULTURAL GROWTH.**  
**GROWTH OF THE TOTAL PRODUCTION OF AGRICULTURE**  
**IN PERCENTAGES TO THE PRE-WAR PERIOD**

1926-27	...	...	...	106.6
1927-28	...	...	...	107.2
1928-29	...	...	...	109.1
1929-30	...	...	...	113.1
1931	...	...	...	118.2

**CATTLE BREEDING IN PERCENTAGES**

<i>Year.</i>	<i>Horses.</i>	<i>Big Horned Cattle.</i>	<i>Sheep and Goats.</i>	<i>Pigs.</i>	<i>Meat and fats for the market.</i>
1916	...	100	100	100	100
1927	...	88.9	114.3	119.3	111.3
1928	...	94.6	118.5	126	126.1
1929	...	96.9	115.6	127.8	103
1930	...	88.6	87.0	75	60.1
					29.2

**GRAIN CULTIVATION IN PERCENTAGES**

		<i>Sowing Area.</i>	<i>Gross production.</i>	<i>Market production.</i>
1913	...	100	100	100
1926-27	...	96.9	91.9	37
1927-28	...	94.7	90.8	36.8
1928-29	...	98.2	94.4	58
1929-30	...	105.1	110.0	73
1931	...	112.6	119.2	79
1932	...	120.9	—	—

**COMMERCIAL CROPS**

**SOWING AREA IN PERCENTAGES TO 1913**

	<i>Cotton.</i>	<i>Flax.</i>	<i>Sugar Beet.</i>	<i>Oil Plants.</i>
1927	107.1	86.6	102.6	179.4
1928	131.4	95.7	124.2	230.9
1929	151.4	112.9	125.8	219.7
1930	217.0	125.0	169.0	260.0
1931	296.9	156.6	221.0	—

**GROSS PRODUCTION IN PERCENTAGES TO 1913**

	<i>Cotton.</i>	<i>Flax.</i>	<i>Sugar Beet.</i>	<i>Oil Plants.</i>
1927	—	—	—	—
1928	110.5	71.6	93	169.9
1929	119	81.5	58	149.8
1930	182.8	101.3	139.4.	220
1932	196			

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